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THE NEW YORKER

AUG. 23, 2004

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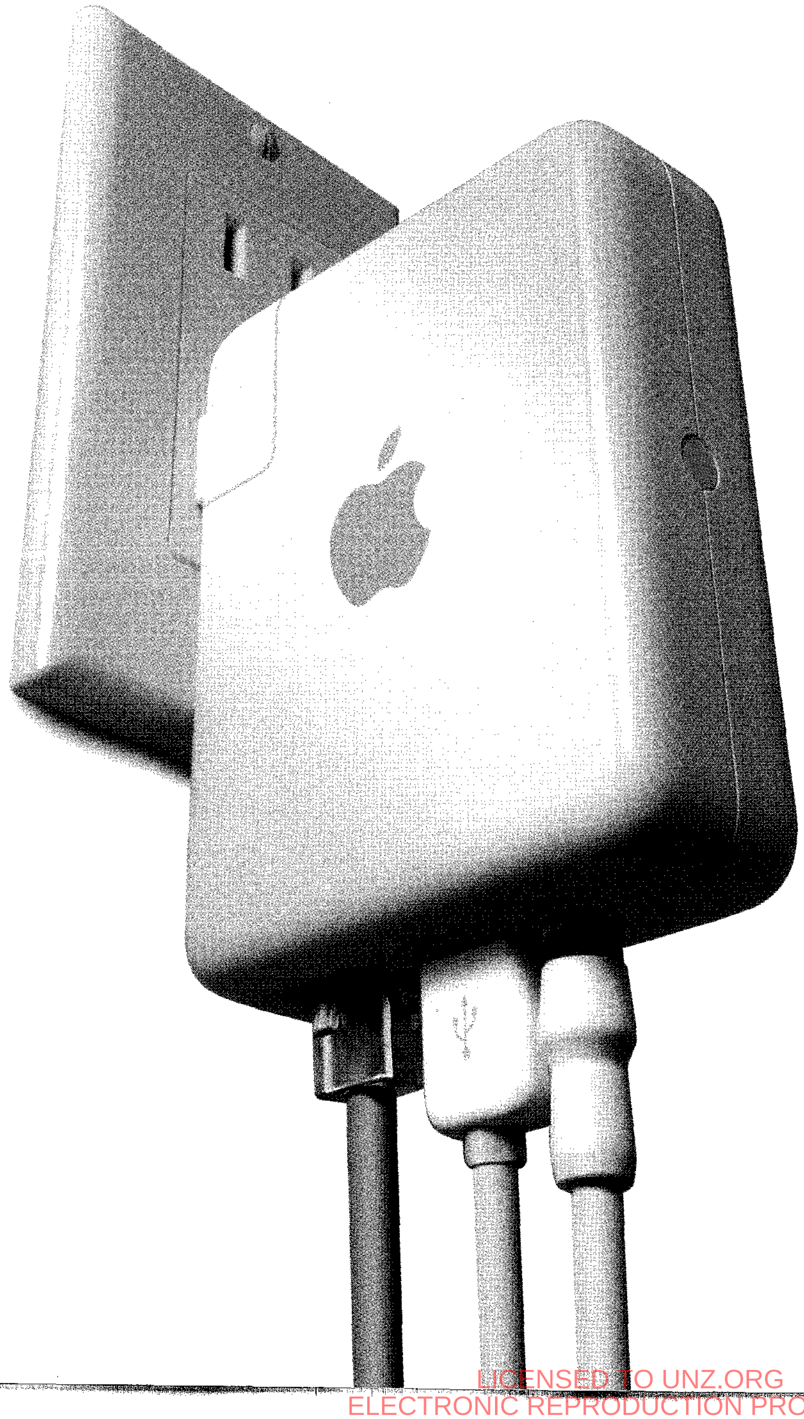

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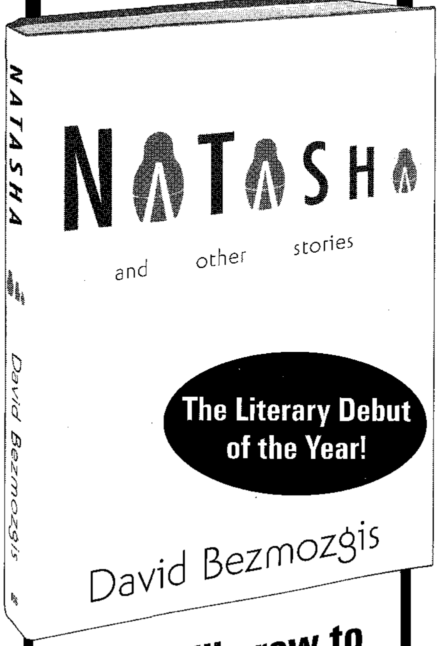

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—Pam Houston, *O Magazine*

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FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX
*Charles E. May, *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

THE NEW YORKER

AUGUST 23, 2004

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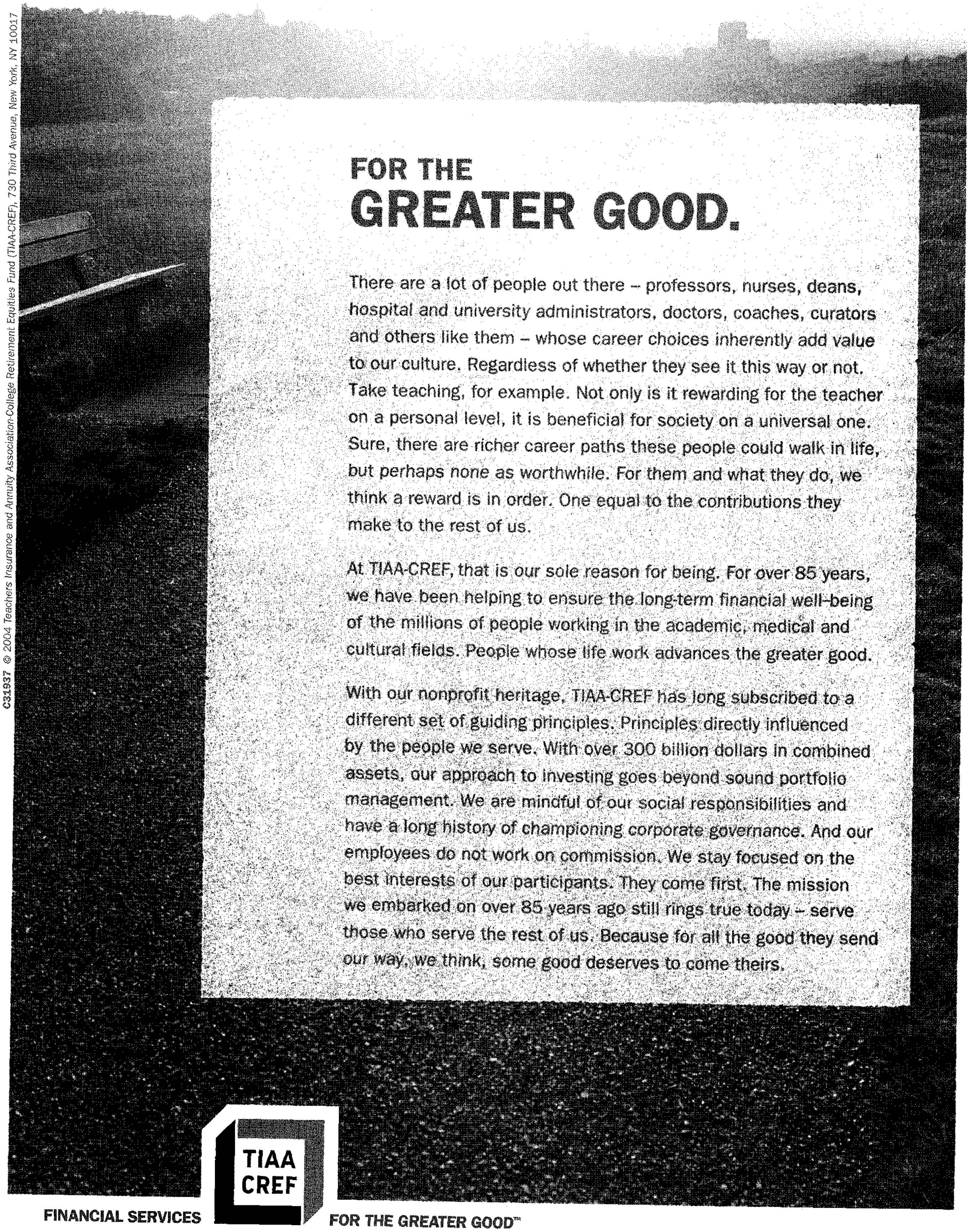

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GREATER GOOD.

There are a lot of people out there – professors, nurses, deans, hospital and university administrators, doctors, coaches, curators and others like them – whose career choices inherently add value to our culture. Regardless of whether they see it this way or not. Take teaching, for example. Not only is it rewarding for the teacher on a personal level, it is beneficial for society on a universal one. Sure, there are richer career paths these people could walk in life, but perhaps none as worthwhile. For them and what they do, we think a reward is in order. One equal to the contributions they make to the rest of us.

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"This gem of a book is equal parts history, mystery... and memoir."
—*Publishers Weekly*
(starred review)

de-fin-ing the wind \de-ˈfīn-ing the ˈwind\ *ger* 1: *the Beaufort Scale, and how a 19th-century admiral turned science into poetry* 2: *by Scott Huler*

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"Huler wonderfully relays the history contained, as he so aptly writes, in the Beaufort scale's 'one hundred ten words... and four centuries of backstory.'"
—*Booklist*

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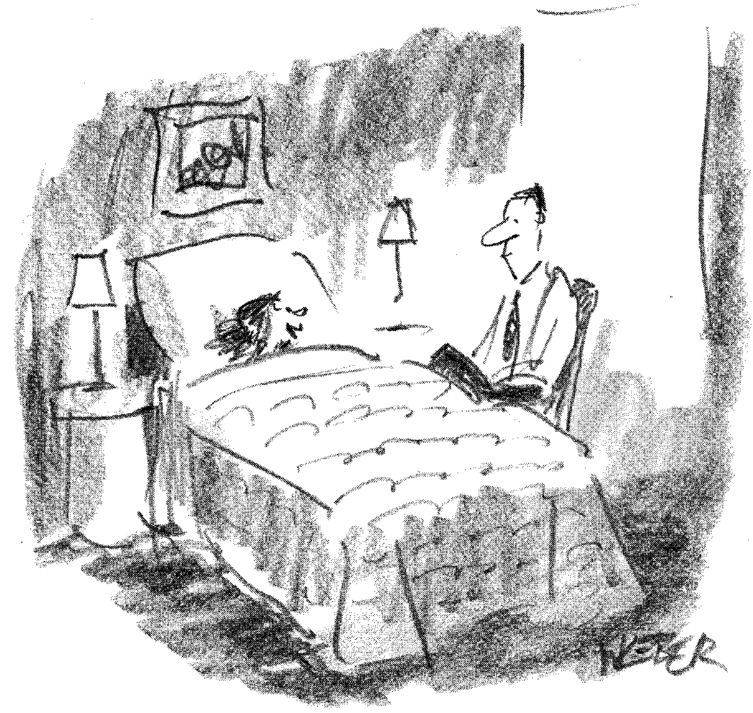
Peter Schjeldahl (The Art World, p. 86) is the magazine's art critic.

Hilton Als (The Theatre, p. 88), the author of "The Women," received the 2002-03 George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism. ♦



"Tell me the fairy tale about the economy."

THE MAIL

KERRY'S WORLD

Having witnessed John Kerry attempt to act "cool" on MTV and generally eschew any opportunity to assert himself as the humanist opposition to the current Administration, I was looking for a reason to vote for him beyond the fact that he's not George W. Bush. I found at least one in Philip Gourevitch's article ("Damage Control," July 26th). While the Kerry of 2004 is certainly not the Kerry of 1974, his words and actions thirty years ago, when, as a decorated veteran, he opposed the war in Vietnam, must contribute to our assessment of the candidate. The excerpts from Kerry's Vietnam journal in Gourevitch's piece are truly fine examples of writing—simple, profound, and elegant. And, as Gourevitch points out, "so little of it is about him." For Kerry to do what he did in battle, to testify before Congress the way he did, and to write the way he wrote, all require a remarkable level of existential and intellectual poise. Al Gore did not prove to enough people, even among those who disliked Bush, that he deserved to be President. Unfortunately similar as the Kerry and Gore campaigns might be, the difference that Gourevitch's article makes clear is that Kerry is indeed a hero.
Paul Wallfisch
New York City

I happen to like George W. Bush and believe that he is on the right path in foreign policy. I also found Gourevitch's piece on John Kerry's foreign-policy views wholly unbalanced. What's more, as Gourevitch notes, Kerry opposed the first Gulf War, at a time when Iraq had invaded Kuwait and the United Nations supported military intervention. Am I really supposed to believe that Kerry will be strong on national security now?
Joel H. Kaplan
Chicago, Ill.

Gourevitch's piece gave me a better idea of who John Kerry is: a person of considerable experience in the affairs of government, who has taken clear stands on a long series of crucial issues, and who has real knowledge of foreign affairs and a tendency to place himself in the center of the political spectrum. The last of those traits is especially important; in this particular instance of our history, achieving a balanced and measured position—one that can unite and create consensus at home and in the world—is crucial. It is clear that extreme ideological positions to the right or the left simply do not work in a global context, or in the current domestic climate.
Barbara Carle
Sacramento, Calif.

Gourevitch, in his piece on Kerry, observes that "no other Vietnam War hero has ever been nominated for President, nor has any other former antiwar leader." That last part is true with reference to Vietnam, but it hasn't always been so. Abraham Lincoln opposed the Mexican War—and, in 1849, lost his seat in Congress as a result. Eleven years later, Lincoln was running for the Presidency.
Edd Doerr
Silver Spring, Md.

John Kerry complains to Gourevitch that President Bush invaded Iraq without sufficient support from the international community. Australia, Italy, England, Japan, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine all supported the war in Iraq and sent troops. In Kerry's view, I guess, these countries are insignificant. So why should Bush be considered the one with a narrow view of the world?
Eduard Dordea
Las Vegas, Nev.

•

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THIS WEEK'S
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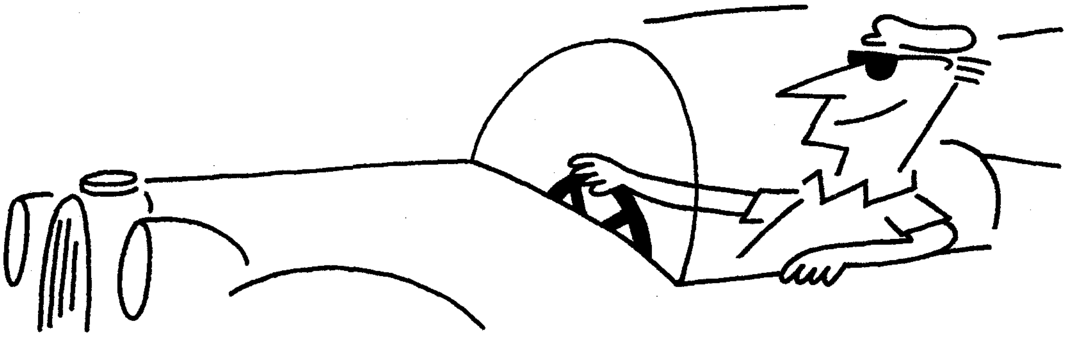
GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



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For expanded events listings, please visit www.newyorker.com/goingson.

THIS WEEK

VOICES CARRY

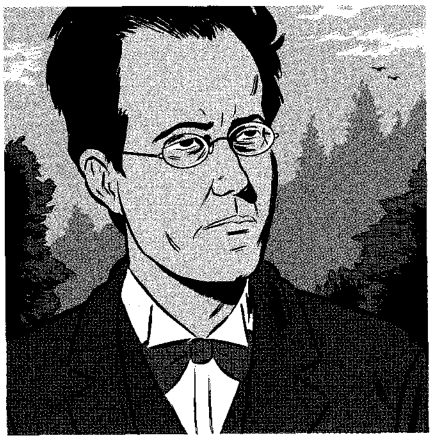
The Dayton-based indie-rock group Guided by Voices has announced that it will disband at the end of this year. For almost two decades, the group has wrapped the sterling wordplay of its front man, Robert Pollard, in lo-fi static and, more recently, big-studio production. The most enduring memory, however, will be Pollard's drunken, gleefully shambolic performances. The band's farewell tour will bring them to New York this week as part of the "Hudson River Rocks" concert series at Pier 54, and they'll return for two nights in December at Irving Plaza. (Aug. 19; see Night Life.)

THE WAY IT WAS

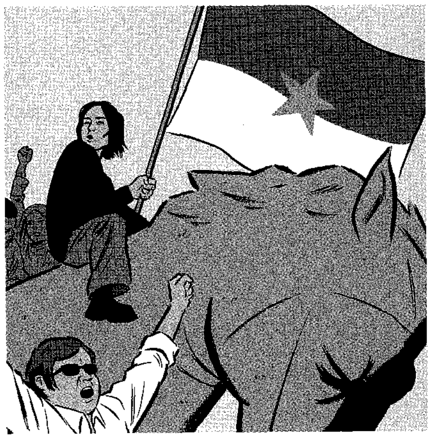
The prospect of protesters running wild in the streets during the upcoming Republican National Convention lends topicality to the Anthology Film Archives' look at the last time our nation had an enthusiastic electorate. A program of rare black-and-white films produced in the sixties and seventies by Newsreel, a network of radical filmmakers, includes footage of the demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, in Chicago; an impressionistic biography of Ho Chi Minh; and coverage of the 1971 Vietnam veterans' march on Washington. (Aug. 20-22; see Movies.)

INTO THE WOODS

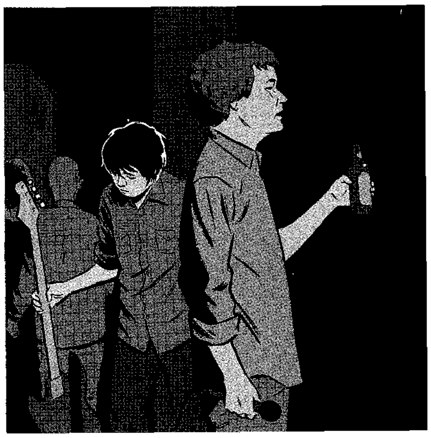
The stage at Maverick Hall, which can hold eighteen musicians, would seem an unlikely place to perform Mahler's symphonies—but the woodland setting is, in a sense, perfect for the works of the ur nature-composer. The music director of Maverick Concerts, Alexander Platt, whose first season was punctuated with the chamber-orchestra version of Mahler's Fourth Symphony, returns to conduct Schoenberg's intimate arrangement of an even grander Mahler work, "Das Lied von der Erde," along with music by Debussy and Strauss (the "Emperor Waltz"). (Woodstock, N.Y., Aug. 21; see Classical Music.)



A performance of Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde," at Maverick.

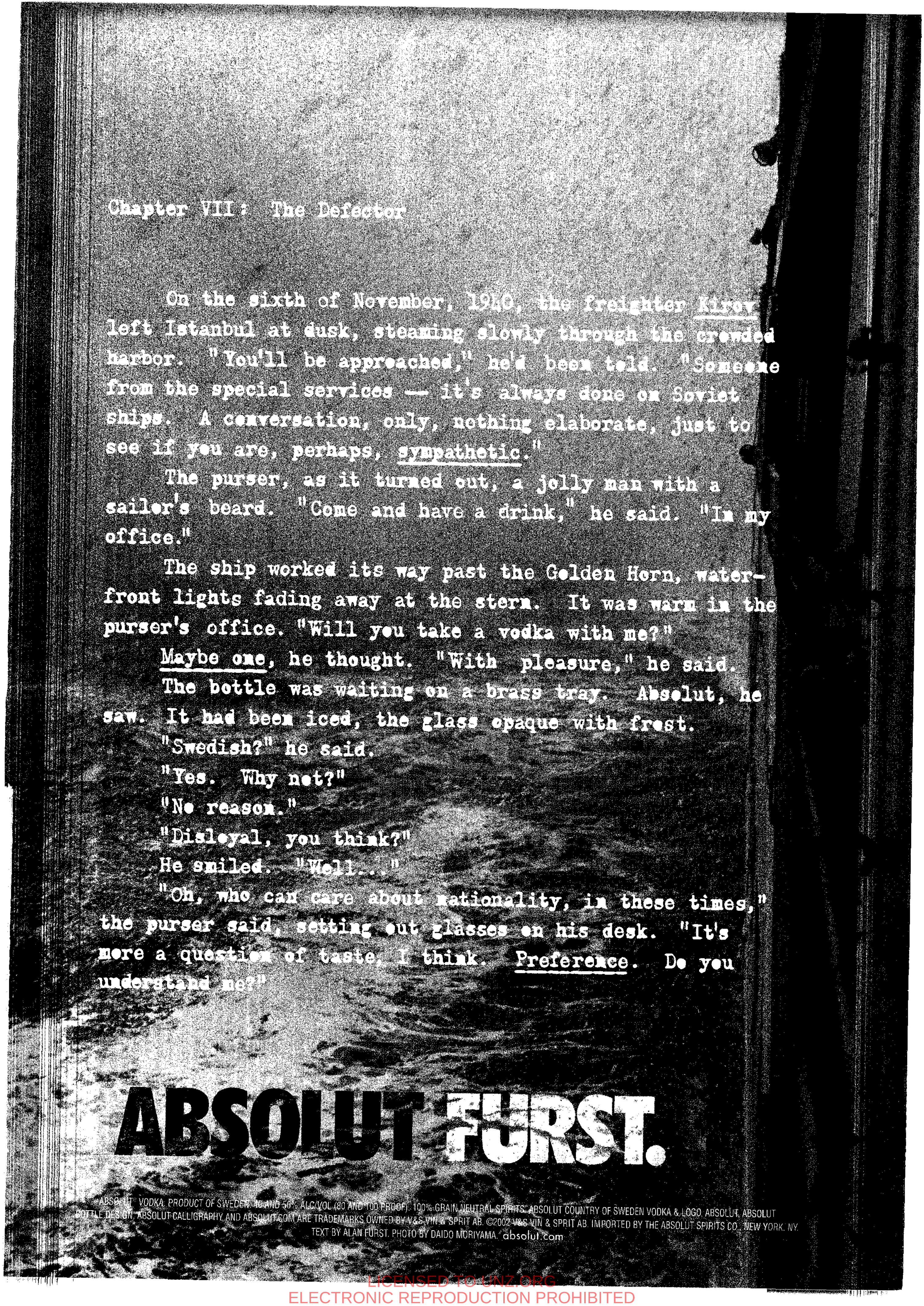


Political documentary footage from the sixties and seventies, at Anthology.



ADRIAN TOMINE

Robert Pollard and Guided by Voices, on their farewell tour, at Pier 54.



Chapter VII: The Defector

On the sixth of November, 1940, the freighter *Kirov* left Istanbul at dusk, steaming slowly through the crowded harbor. "You'll be approached," he'd been told. "Someone from the special services — it's always done on Soviet ships. A conversation, only, nothing elaborate, just to see if you are, perhaps, *sympathetic*."

The purser, as it turned out, a jolly man with a sailor's beard. "Come and have a drink," he said. "In my office."

The ship worked its way past the Golden Horn, waterfront lights fading away at the stern. It was warm in the purser's office. "Will you take a vodka with me?"

Maybe one, he thought. "With pleasure," he said.

The bottle was waiting on a brass tray. Absolut, he saw. It had been iced, the glass opaque with frost.

"Swedish?" he said.

"Yes. Why not?"

"No reason."

"Disloyal, you think?"

He smiled. "Well..."

"Oh, who can care about nationality, in these times," the purser said, setting out glasses on his desk. "It's more a question of taste, I think. *Preference*. Do you understand me?"

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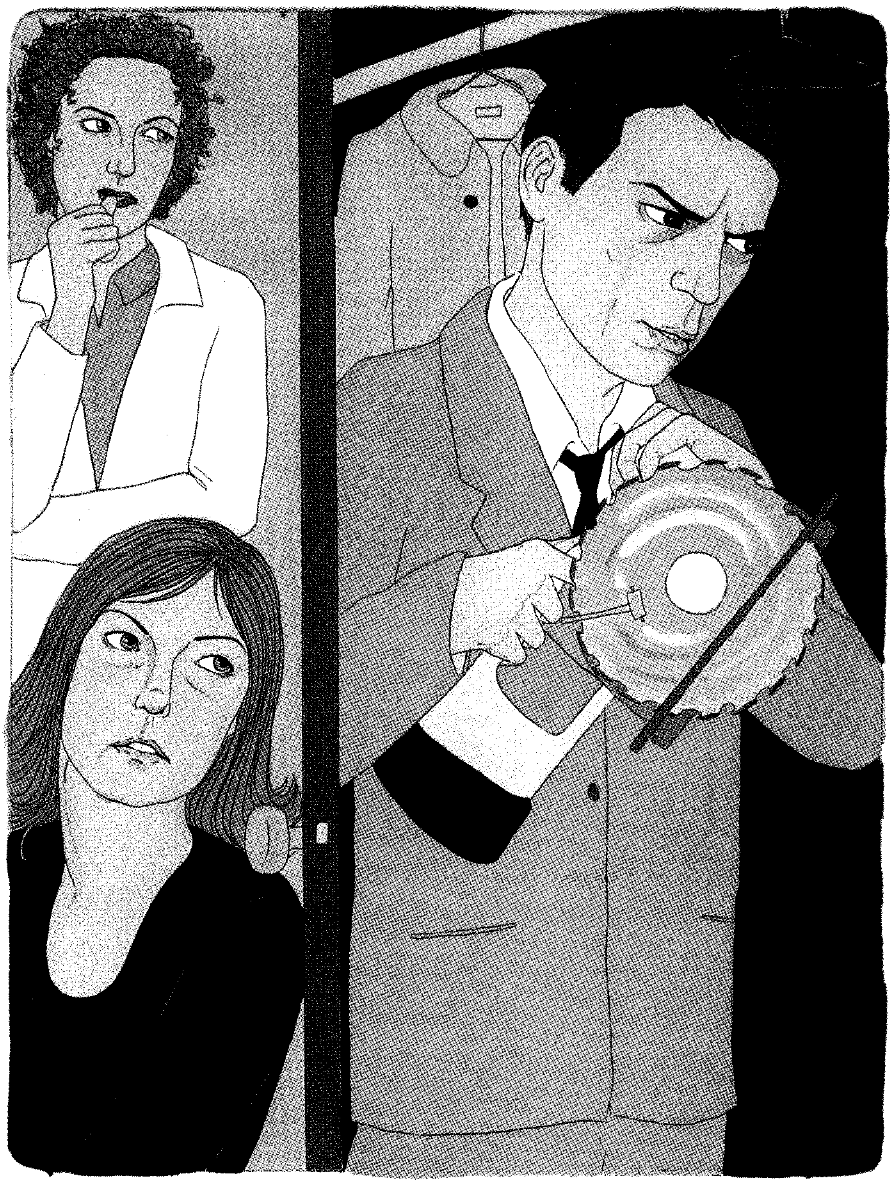

"Armless," a comedy in the eighth annual New York International Fringe Festival.

LARA TOMLIN

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

DRACULA, THE MUSICAL
A new Broadway play inspired by the Bram Stoker story, starring Melissa Errico and Tom Hewitt, has a book and lyrics by Christopher Hampton and Don Black, and music by Frank Wildhorn. Directed by Des McAnuff. Two previews on Aug. 18. Opens Aug. 19 at 6:30. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

GUANTÁNAMO: HONOR BOUND TO DEFEND FREEDOM
A drama about post-9/11 detainees in Guantánamo, composed of interviews with prisoners and their families, comes to the Culture Project (home of "The Exonerated") after a long run in London—where it is still playing. Written by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo. Directed by Nicolas Kent with Sacha Wares. Previews begin Aug. 20. (45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
The eighth annual festival features shows by some two hundred theatre companies from nine countries and dozens of U.S. cities. They have little in common but idiosyncrasy. Some plays to look out for: "Africa & Plumbridge," a musical about a troubled foster child; "Confessions of a Mormon Boy," an autobiographical monologue by Steven Fales; "Jonestown: The Musical," inspired by the 1978 cult massacre; "Armless," Kyle Jarrow's farce about a man who suffers from body-integrity-identity disorder; "Haven," a one-woman show about recent immigrants to this country; and "Live! With Pascale & Chantal!," a spoof of Middle Eastern talk shows. Through Aug. 29. (212-279-4488. For a list of venues and performances, see www.fringenyc.org.)

THE OLDEST PROFESSION
The Signature Theatre Company's 2004-05 season is dedicated to the works of Paula Vogel. It starts off with a comic drama set during the early days of the Reagan Administration, about five aging bawds who struggle with arthritis and a diminishing clientele. Directed by David Esbjornson. Previews begin Aug. 21. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AFTER THE FALL
This drama by Arthur Miller, which premièred in 1964, three years after the end of his troubled marriage to Marilyn Monroe and two years after her spectacular flameout and death, marked a departure for the playwright, stretching his technical and intellectual boundaries. A sprawling work, less conventionally structured than his earlier plays, it is set in 1962 in the transit lounge of the old Idlewild Airport, within the "mind, thought, and memory" of its protagonist, Quentin, a twice-divorced lawyer whose conscience struggles against the uniform thinking of the mob—here composed almost entirely of women. In the Roundabout's revival, the director, Michael Mayer, has given the play new form by cutting it down, giving it a shape that is close to that of "Death of a Salesman." Unfortunately, even with the cuts, Peter Krause, as Quentin, just isn't up to the task of making this academic language live. A remarkably thin actor, he's a blank sheet of paper that resists emotion and ideas. But Carla Gugino's Maggie (presumably based on Marilyn Monroe) is a revelation. She, along with Mayer, makes "After the Fall" worth revisiting, like a dark garden filled with the mesmerizing scent of decay and hope. (Reviewed in our issue of 8/9 & 16/04.) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

THE DAY EMILY MARRIED
Estelle Parsons leads the cast in a Primary Stages production of a new play by Horton Foote about newlyweds who move in with the bride's aged parents. Directed by Michael Wilson. (Reviewed in this issue.) (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

ECHOES OF THE WAR
Two fine one-act plays by J. M. Barrie, written during the First World War, show emotions on the home front. In the first, "The New Word," starring Richard Easton and Aaron Krohn, a diffident father and son say their goodbyes. In the second, "The Old Lady Shows Her Medals," Frances Sternhagen, playing a timid Scottish char who longs for a visit from her son, and Gareth Saxe, as the brusque, handsome son, both give brilliant performances. Directed by Eleanor Reissa. (Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231. Closes Aug. 29.)

FICTION
A new play by Steven Dietz, in which two married writers explore the role that a young woman played in their lives. With assured performances by Emily Bergl, Tom Irwin, and Julie White. Directed by David Warren. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Roundabout, Laura Pels Theatre, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE FROGS
If you like your Aristophanes by way of overproduced Burt Bacharach-style slickness, there is much to recommend "The Frogs" (part of the Lincoln Center Festival, at the Vivian Beaumont). Freely adapted by Burt Shevelove from the 405 B.C. comedy, with music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, the show was originally produced in 1974 at the Yale School of Drama with a cast that included a number of students, among them Meryl Streep, Sigourney Weaver, and Christopher Durang. Here the main event is Nathan Lane, who stars as Dionysos and who has also expanded Shevelove's script from one hour to two and a half. A self-consciously adorable one-man band in a toga, Lane goes out of his way to upstage all the other performers, not to mention the text itself. Suffice it to say that the cloying sentiment at the heart of Lane's windup-puppy style of acting infects everything here, including Susan Stroman's so-so direction and choreography. (8/9 & 16/04) (212-239-6200.)

I LOVE PARIS
You get pretty much what you'd expect in Doug Field's tongue-in-cheek sendup of the socialite heiress Paris Hilton—a heaping portion of celebrity dish with no real surprises. Hilton is played with wide-eyed opacity by Kevin Shinick, who enters the stage in BVDs and a T-shirt. Directed by Timothy Haskell. (Blue Heron Arts Center, 123 E. 24th St. 212-868-4444.)

JUNIE B. JONES
In a chipper new musical based on the children's series by Barbara Park, the six-year-old heroine pops out of her diary—a ceiling-high prop. Junie B., played by the grownup Mary Faber, experiences the ups and downs of first-grade life, assisted by five cast members. Written by the promising duo Marcy Heisler (book and lyrics) and Zina Goldrich (music).

the signature blonde

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Part of the Theatreworks/USA's "Free Summer Theatre" series. (121 Christopher St. For more information, call 212-642-6754. Through Aug. 20.)

LET'S PUT ON A SHOW
Mickey Rooney and his wife, Jan, bring a musical retrospective of the actor's life and loves to the Irish Repertory Theatre. With musical direction by Sam Kriger. (132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

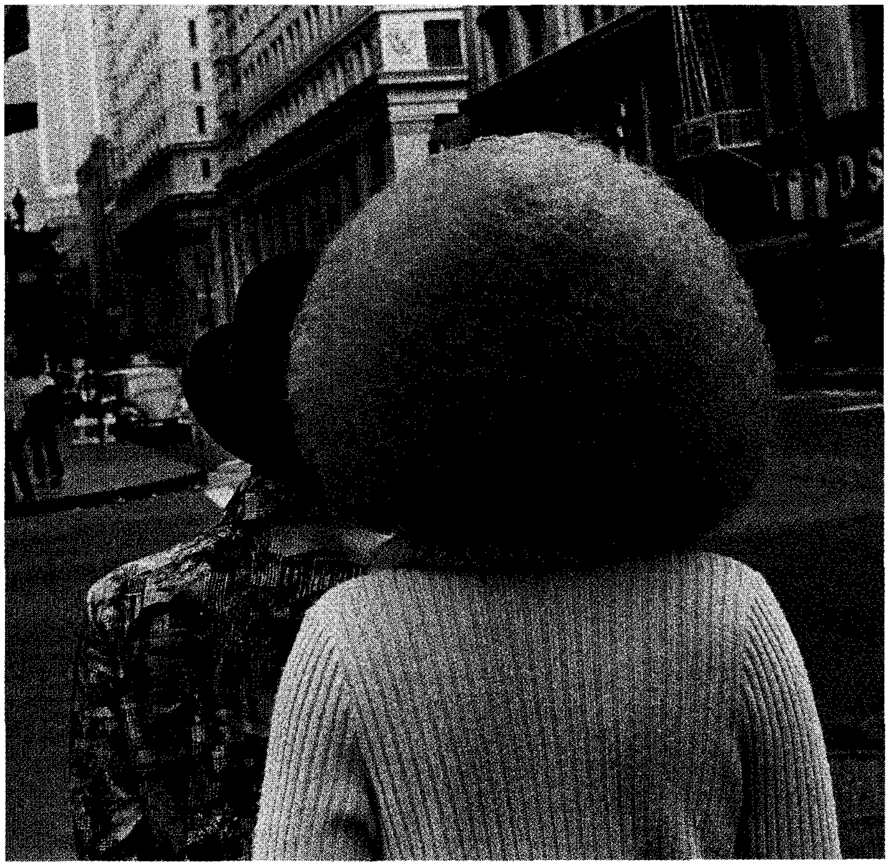
THE LOVES OF SHAKESPEARE'S WOMEN
The actress Susannah York wrote and performs in a solo show that shows the thread of passion that connects the female characters—whether historic or invented—in Shakespeare's plays. (Blue Heron Arts Center, 123 E. 24th St. 212-868-4444. Through Aug. 29.)

MEDEA IN JERUSALEM
Rebecca Wisocky stars in a new production of Euripides' tragedy, adapted by Roger Kirby, that portrays Medea as a Palestinian Muslim and Jason as an Israeli Jew. Directed by Steven Little. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

MRS. FARNSWORTH
A. R. Gurney's play about a Connecticut Wasp who had a compromising relationship with the current President returns to the Flea. Directed by Jim Simpson. (41 White St. 212-352-3101. Through Sept. 4.)

PLUMS IN NEW YORK
A young woman obsessed with plums and August Strindberg visits Manhattan, in a play written and performed by Anna Rósa Sigurdardóttir. A production of the Icelandic Connection. Directed by Hera Ólafsdottir. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

WAITIN' 2 END HELL
William A. Parker's drama about the failing marriage of a black middle-class couple has some sharp writing in it, especially in its insightful treatment of the complex relationships between black women and black men. It also has stellar performances from its two leads, Marcus Naylor and Trish McCall. Directed by Woodie King, Jr. (47th St. Playhouse, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. Through Aug. 22.)



"Untitled (Afro)," by Leon Levinstein, at the "Do" group show at Pace/MacGill.

ALSO PLAYING

AIDA
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.

AVENUE Q
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.

BOMBAY DREAMS
Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.

THE BOY FROM OZ
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

BUG
Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St., at Seventh Ave. 212-239-6200.

CAROLINE, OR CHANGE
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Aug. 29.)

CHICAGO
Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF
Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100.

42ND STREET
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

FROZEN
Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 212-239-6200. (Closes Aug. 22.)

GOLDA'S BALCONY
Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

HAIRSPRAY
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.

I AM MY OWN WIFE
Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS
Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. (Closes Aug. 22.)

MAMMA MIA!
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

MOVIN' OUT
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.

THE PRODUCERS
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100.

WICKED
Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

WONDERFUL TOWN
Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

DANCE

"FOREVER TANGO"
Luis Bravo's evening of Argentine dance played on Broadway for a year and has toured five continents. In honor of the show's tenth anniversary, the Shubert hosts a six-week run, with fourteen dancers and an eleven-piece orchestra. (225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. Aug. 17 and Aug. 19-20 at 8, Aug. 18 and Aug. 21 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 22 at 3. Through Aug. 29.)

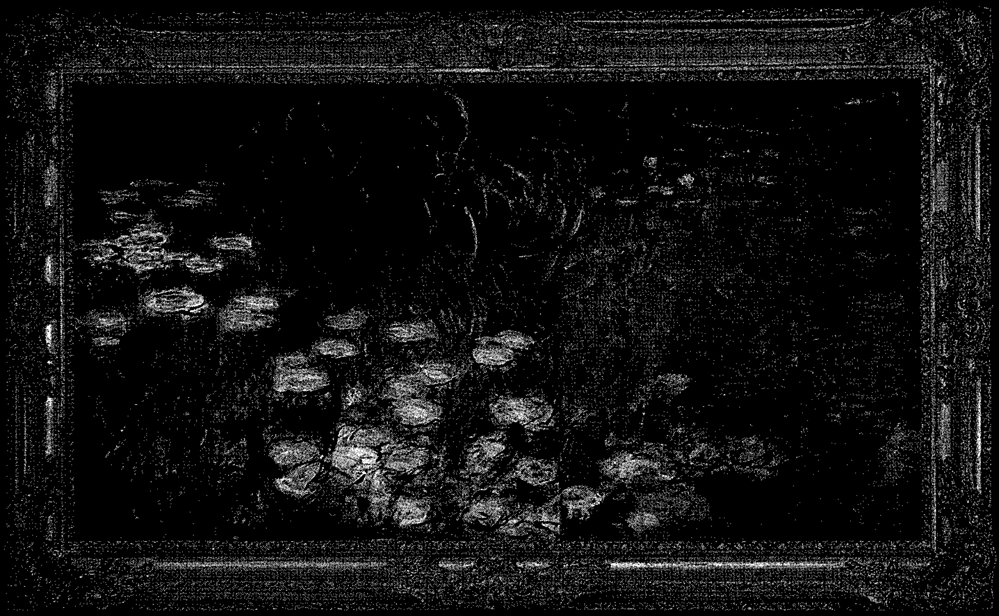
MOSTLY MOZART
Mark Morris, the music man of modern dance, joins with the Orchestra of St. Luke's and Voices of Ascension to present a program of mostly Baroque work, performed by his company, Mark Morris Dance Group. Morris always follows the score, but "Marble Halls" (1985) and "Jesu, Meine Freude" (1993), both set to Bach, are especially close readings. "A Lake" (1991), set to Haydn's Horn Concerto, is freer—still abstract but closer to narrative—while "I Don't Want to Love" (1996) acts out the lamentations of Monteverdi madrigals with a sensibility somewhere between camp and cutting sincerity. (New York State Theatre, Columbus Ave. at 63rd St. 212-870-5570. Aug. 19 and Aug. 21 at 8.)

SMUIN BALLET
Michael Smuin wants ballet to be accessible, and he often choreographs to pop songs. This year, he's taking on Elton John. "Come Dance Me a Song" has all of the Academy Awards-show blandness of last year's "Dancin' with Gershwin," but almost none of its clever showmanship. It isn't simply that the songs aren't as good; they aren't as good for Smuin and his Broadway moxie. There's more invention in the repertory works, "Tango Palace" and "Les Noces," which is set to the Stravinsky score. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Aug. 16-17 and Aug. 19-20 at 8 and Aug. 18 and Aug. 21 at 2 and 8.)

"LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS"
The annual festival of free outdoor performances continues. In the plaza, Sounds of Korea, an all-female troupe of Korean-Americans, showcases courtly traditions and ornate costumes on Aug. 22 at 6. In the band shell, the heritage on display is African-American. An old-meets-new double bill pairs the wide repertory of the venerable Dallas Black Dance Theatre with the contemporary sensibility and West African boogie of Ronald K. Brown's young company, Evidence, performing Aug. 24-25 at 7:30. (For more information about performances, venues, and times, see www.lincolncenter.org or call 212-875-5766. Through Aug. 30.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL
The three-year-old New York troupe Shen Wei Dance Arts comes to the Pillow's main stage. The Chinese-born Wei is also a painter and calligrapher, and the program, which includes the group's production of "Rite of Spring," from 2003, and the abstract "Behind Resonance," from 2001, demonstrates his interest in sculptural choreography; he likes to assemble his dancers into tableaux. On the smaller Doris Duke stage, Dayna and Gaelen Hanson's Seattle-based dance-theatre group 33 Fainting Spells presents "Our Little Sunbeam," a madcap update of Chekhov's "Ivanov" lip-synched to the accompaniment of contemporary music, from Led Zeppelin and Waylon Jennings to



his signature masterpiece

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live rap by Linas Phillips. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. Shen Wei Dance Arts: Aug. 18-20 at 8, Aug. 21 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 22 at 2. 33 Fainting Spells: Aug. 19-20 at 8:15, Aug. 21 at 2:15 and 8:15, and Aug. 22 at 5.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

HOWL! FESTIVAL
This second annual gathering of East Village artists, musicians, and performers features more than a thousand participants in more than four hundred events. Highlights include a concert by the Three Terrors, a side project of the Magnetic Fields' Stephin Merritt (Angel Orensanz Center, 172 Norfolk St., between Houston and Stanton Sts., Aug. 18 at 8); the Charlie Parker Jazz Festival (see below); and Wigstock, the drag spectacular in Tompkins Square Park (St. Marks Pl. at Avenue A, Aug. 21 at 5). (For more information about the festival, visit www.howlfestival.com. See also CBGB's, Joe's Pub, and Webster Hall, as well as the listing in Above and Beyond.)

"JOE'S PUB IN THE PARK"
Aug. 18 at 7: The leather-clad German chanteuse **Ute Lemper** shares the billing with **Stew,** a raconteur and singer from Los Angeles who writes songs that echo Cole Porter, Burt Bacharach, and Randy Newman. Aug. 19 at 7: The cheeky British vocalist **Jamie Cullum** and the dramatic young singer **Nellie McKay.** Aug. 21 at 7: The Howl! Festival presents a night of local Afro-pop with **Antibalas** and others. Aug. 22 at 7: The fresh-faced soul rocker **Gavin DeGraw.** Aug. 24 at 7: The eccentric seventies icon **Todd Rundgren** and the piano-pounding New Wave veteran **Joe Jackson,** two singer-songwriters as well known for their disdain for convention as for their music. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park near W. 81st St. 212-239-6200.)

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Aug. 18 at 7:30: The Sweet Harmony Travelling Revue brings together **Emmylou Harris, Gillian Welch, David Rawlings, Patty Griffin,** and **Buddy Miller.** (Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. 212-360-2777.)

ORO SOLIDO
A night of merengue. (Museo del Barrio, Fifth Ave. at 104th St. 212-831-7272. Aug. 19 at 6.)

"HUDSON RIVER ROCKS"
Guided by Voices headlines the final show of the summer at Pier 54. (See This Week.) With the New York City band **Ambulance Ltd.** (Hudson River Park, West Side Highway at 14th St. 212-533-7275. Aug. 19 at 7.)

CD 101.9 NEW YORK JAZZFEST
This gathering features jazz-pop fusion, served alfresco. Aug. 20 at 6: The singers **Al Jarreau** and **Regina Belle** and the sax star **David Sanborn.** Aug. 21 at 4: Rite of Strings, a fusion supergroup featuring the bassist **Stanley Clarke,** the guitarist **Al Di Meola,** and the violinist **Jean-Luc Ponty,** is joined by the tenor titan **Michael Brecker** and the **Robben Ford Band.** Aug. 22 at 3: The pop vocalist **India Arie** and the smooth-jazz favorites **Brian Culbertson, Kim Waters,** and **Soulive.** (Central Park SummerStage, mid-Park at 72nd St. For tickets, call 212-307-7171.)

"LIVE FROM HOME"
The winning acoustic-music series at the Housing Works Used Book Café continues with **Rachael Yamagata, Marc Broussard,** and **Griffin House.** (126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324. Aug. 20 at 7:30.)

CHARLIE PARKER JAZZ FESTIVAL
These free annual concerts are guaranteed high points of the summer. The uptown show features the saxophonists **Jimmy Heath** and **Donald Harrison,** the singer **Vanessa Rubin,** and the keyboardist **Rachel Z.** (Marcus Garvey Park, Fifth Ave. at 112th St. Aug. 21 at 3.) Heath makes a downtown appearance as well, along with **Kenny Garrett, Terri Lyne Carrington,** and the rarely seen alto giant **Frank Morgan.** (Tompkins Square Park, St. Marks Pl. at Avenue A. For more information, call 212-360-1399. Aug. 22 at 3.)

DIANA KRALL
On her latest album, "The Girl in the Other Room," the popular interpretive singer presented her own songs (co-written with her husband, Elvis Costello). The reinvention seems to be working—the album's a hit. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. Aug. 24 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Aug. 18: Good Golly, Miss Molly, it's the rock-and-roll original **Little Richard.** Aug. 20: A pair of cover bands mark the birthday of the rock deity Robert Plant, the face and hair of Led Zeppelin. **Black Dog** takes a conventional approach to the Zep's signature thunder. The opener, **Lez Zeppelin,** claims to be the only all-girl band devoted to "kicking out the jams of the greatest, most testosterone-fueled rock band in the world." Aug. 23: **Ozomatli,** the extra-large Latin-funk collective from L.A.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Aug. 18: The ambitious, slightly psychedelic Brit pop of the **Music.** Aug. 19: The Philadelphia power trio **Burning Brides,** which has a new album, "Leaves No Ashes," specializes in burly guitar rock. Aug. 20: **Mofro,** from Jacksonville, Florida, plays gritty swamp funk.

CBGB & OMFUG
315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (212-982-4052)—Aug. 19: A tribute to the Velvet Underground, marking the rerelease of its 1972 album, "Live at Max's Kansas City," featuring **Aaron Seven,** the **Babyskins,** the **Domestics, Toby Goodshank, Rebecca Moore,** the **Olga Gogolas, Schwervon,** and others. Aug. 20: The **Loser's Lounge** salutes a vanishing hotbed of bohemian culture, with a night of songs by such punk stalwarts as Blondie, the Ramones, Television, Talking Heads, and Patti Smith.

CORAL ROOM
512 W. 29th St. (212-244-1965)—Aug. 24: **Songs from a Random House** is a ukulele-driven (they've got two of them) surreal-pop group. It has mournful violas and a tight rhythm section, as well as a new record, "gListen," that's full of dreamy lyrics, intricate uke picking, and occasional drones, which may have been inspired by their principal songwriter's studies with the spare and idiosyncratic composer Morton Feldman.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Aug. 18: The Birmingham, England, reggae outfit **Steel Pulse** has turned out more than a dozen albums during the past two decades (its latest is "African Holocaust"). The band is best experienced live, when the gravelly vocalist David Hinds converts even the most strident polemic into a party.

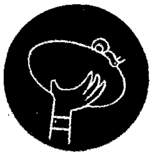
JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Aug. 17-19: **Donovan,** the premier practitioner of fanciful psychedelic pop and ethereal folk rock. Aug. 23: **Keren Ann,** an Israeli-born singer-songwriter now based in France, caresses her acoustic guitar with Continental discretion and sings intimate ballads about love, loss, and other late-night concerns. She's celebrating the release of her first United States album, "Not Going Anywhere."

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Aug. 19-20: **Sufjan Stevens** plays guitar, banjo, and a number of other instruments, and sings touching songs about his home state, Michigan. Aug. 22: The singer-songwriter **Noam Weinstein.**

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Aug. 21: The young men in the hip local foursome the **Mooney Suzuki** made their name with sweaty garage rock and obvious nods to such old-school proto-punks as the MC5 and the Stooges. They caught the eye of Columbia Records, which paired them with the pop production team the Matrix (known for its work with Avril Lavigne) for their new album, "Alive & Amplified."

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Aug. 24: The politically charged singer-songwriter **Dan Bern** closes the Howl! Festival.

TABLES FOR TWO



HEARTH
403 E. 12th St. (646-602-1300)—Hearth attracts a sophisticated sort. "I had something that looked just like this in Paris at L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon," one diner said when she was presented with a bouffant of toasted-coconut soufflé. Large copper pots hang from a blasted-brick wall, and in the bathroom worn editions of M. F. K. Fisher's "How to Cook a Wolf" and "Larousse Gastronomique" have been thoughtfully supplied. But the best education at this spectacular restaurant can be had simply by taking a seat at the narrow counter that borders the kitchen and asking the chef and co-owner, Marco Canora (formerly of Craft), about everything that he turns out. It feels very personal when he offers a hot shot glass of yellow-pepper purée—a pleasantly uncomplicated way to start a meal—and recommends an entrée: Alaskan king salmon, poached at 110 degrees "so it doesn't lose its fat" and served at room temperature with a lively salad of green beans and jewel-like cherry tomatoes in a light and peppery vinaigrette. Canora has a habit of presenting several preparations of the same ingredient: the lamb comes with a lamb sausage in a zucchini canoe; the monkfish has a roasted eggplant with crispy fried capers and a seaweedy heap of julienned eggplant on the side; the *crudo* appetizer consists of little piles of minced raw red snapper topped by a slab of raw red snapper, rosemary, and a fleck of red pepper.

This restaurant is a hopeful place. The help is friendly and generous, and there isn't a trace of the finickiness of which Craft has sometimes been accused. The "beverage director" gives solid advice about which summer ale (both the wine list and the regular menu are seasonal) would be bold enough to accompany a sirloin steak, or which wine should go with the salmon. (She suggested a rosé, which was perfect.) Watching the line cooks hustle and sweat and Canora complete every plate with a flourish of fresh herbs and seasoning does nothing to debunk the mystery—not even when you catch him, out of the corner of your eye, popping a lettuce leaf from a waiting green salad into his mouth. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner. Entrées $19-$28.)

—*Dana Goodyear*

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Aug. 18-21: **Mark Murphy.** There are few authentic bebop singers still with us; Murphy, active since the mid-fifties, is at the top of his game.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Aug. 17-18: The Cuban expatriate **Francisco Aguabella,** a legend in the Latin-music community, is a master percussionist whose rhythms have jolted everyone from Dizzy Gillespie to Frank Sinatra. He's joined by two other expert *congueros:* **Patato** and **Ray Barretto.** Aug. 19-22: **McCoy Tyner,** an electrifying figurehead of modern jazz piano, collaborates with the tap-dance iconoclast **Savion Glover.**

CHARLIE O'S TIMES SQUARE
1611 Broadway, at 49th St. (212-246-1960)—After some four years downtown at the Cajun, a restaurant in Chelsea, **Vince Giordano** and his **Nighthawks Orchestra** have moved uptown.

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Manning the most unwieldy of instruments (bass, tuba, bass saxophone) as well as a bulbous vintage Kellogg microphone, Giordano leads a tuxedo-clad eleven-piece band whose ease with early jazz and swing breathes life into an overlooked era. The ensemble thrives on authenticity and affection, rather than nostalgia and affectation. They're here on Mondays and Tuesdays.

LE JAZZ AU BAR
41 E. 58th St. (212-308-9455)—Through Aug. 22: **Maureen McGovern's** pop indiscretions of the seventies have long been forgotten (or forgiven), and she's made a successful transformation to cabaret fixture.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Aug. 18-19: **Doug Wamble's** remarkable début album, "Country Libations," from 2003, presented a new talent capable of juggling country blues, swing, free jazz, and gospel. This gifted guitarist, vocalist, and composer merits careful attention. Aug. 20-22: For those who have followed the three-decade on-again, off-again partnership of the intuitively lyrical guitarist **Gene Bertoncini** and the bassist **Michael Moore,** their reunion stands as the big event of the season.

Creative Time presents the "Freedom of Expression National Monument," in Foley Square starting Aug. 17 (see Art).

JEROEN KOOLHAAS

SMOKE
2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. (212-864-6662)—Aug. 20-21: **Peter Bernstein** is usually heard with, among many others, Lou Donaldson. Here the guitarist roams free with a trio.

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—It's always a good thing to find **Carl Allen,** a model of supportive drumming, on a bandstand. The perennial sideman leads his own swinging group on Aug. 20-21.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Aug. 22: The pianist **Cedar Walton.** Beneath Walton's mild-mannered surface is a jazzman of steely power and intelligence. He's a renowned improviser, and he's backed here by **David Williams** and **Joe Farnsworth.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—The Choson dynasty ruled the Korean peninsula from 1392 to 1910, a stretch of astonishing stability that produced decorative arts of distinctive simplicity and beauty. **"Hidden Jewels: Korean Art from the Mary Griggs Burke Collection"** presents thirty-six exemplary objects—ceramics, statuary, paintings, and lacquerwork—from a rarely seen private collection. Outstanding is a scroll depicting Shakyamuni Buddha and two attendant bodhisattvas, one of only four such images to survive from a set of four hundred scrolls commissioned by Queen Dowager Munjong in the sixteenth century. Through Jan. 9. ♦ **"Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century."** Through Sept. 6. ♦ **"Ruhlmann: Genius of Art Deco."** Through Sept. 5. ♦ **"August Sander: People of the Twentieth Century, a Photographic Portrait of Germany."** Through Sept. 19. ♦ **"Childe Hassam, American Impressionist."** Through Sept. 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—A sculptor who went AWOL from the gallery scene more than thirty years ago makes her triumphant return with **"Lee Bontecou: A Retrospective."** In the heyday of minimalism, Bontecou produced complex, Orwellian-looking sculptures out of everything from the drab canvas used on conveyor belts to sparkplugs, saws, and pipe fittings. Her drawings are simultaneously anachronistic—like Baron von Münchausen fantasies or a Leonardo war machine—and futuristic, calling to mind the slithering forms of anime. Later porcelain sculptures arranged as horizontal tableaux recall Giacometti's Surrealist period and the apocalyptic dreamscapes of Matta and Yves Tanguy. Younger artists would inevitably contextualize these objects with lengthy texts, but Bontecou, unsettlingly, leaves everything untitled. Through Sept. 27. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Constantin Brancusi: The Essence of Things."** Through Sept. 19. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—**"Cotton Puffs, Q-Tips, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha"** and **"Ed Ruscha and Photography."** Through Sept. 26. ♦ **"Ana Mendieta: Earth Body Sculpture and Performance 1972-1985."** Through Sept. 19. ♦ **"Evidence of Impact: Art and Photography 1963-1978."** Through Oct. 10. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT ALTRIA
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (917-663-2453)—Teresa Hubbard and Alexander Birchler's **"Single Wide"** traffics in rural noir, mixing Gregory Crewdson-style images with crisp stock soundtrack noises (ticking clocks, dripping water, a barking dog) à la Janet Cardiff. The camera circles around and through a trailer home at night as a distraught woman drives a pickup truck into the kitchen, then emerges, bleeding, from the wreckage. The video loops continuously, making the wrecked trailer suddenly whole again and returning the undamaged pickup to its portentous revving in the yard. The nonlinear nar-

rative film does not break new ground, but slipping into a little midtown theatre and being transported midday to a nocturnal dreamscape is still a seductive prospect. Through Oct. 22. (Open weekdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Modigliani: Beyond the Myth."** Through Sept. 19. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45; Thursdays, 11 to 8; and Fridays, 11 to 3.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—The oils, watercolors, and engravings in **"Into the Storm: Expressions in the American Landscape, 1800-1940"** incline more to the academic than to the tempestuous. Thomas Cole's 1836 "Seascape with a Waterspout" is the stormiest of the batch, with Turneresque coloring and the shattered mast of a ship in the foreground. George Bellows, better known for his paintings of boxers, is represented by a thickly impastoed canvas of storm clouds over Maine's Monhegan Island. There's also a room full of William Trost Richards's lovely, diminutive seascapes and Thomas Moran's 1884 painting of cumulus clouds gathering over a prehistoric-looking East Hampton.Through Oct. 10. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Summer-hours warning: many galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6. Others follow the normal Tuesday-to-Saturday schedule. It's best to call ahead.

MARK DI SUVERO
An elder statesman of monumental steel-beam sculpture offers an object lesson in outdoor installation—call it "Park Exhibition 101." At the south end is "Aesope's Fables" (1990), a geometric, tension-filled composition whose bright-red color is complemented nicely by the tan, sandy gravel it rests on. Mid-park is "Beyond" (2004), a rusted behemoth constructed with I-beams and curling ribbons of steel propped on a patch of verdant grass. Sitting in a cement circle over a fountain spout on the northern end is the skyscraper-mimicking "Double Tetrahedron" (2004), watched over by Augustus Saint-Gaudens's staid bronze sculpture of Admiral David Glasgow Farragut, a permanent park resident. Through Oct. 31. (Madison Square Park.)

"AFRICAN ART IS . . ."
Art from fourteen nations recaps some forty shows that appeared at the Museum for African Art in SoHo, which has temporarily relocated to Queens while a new facility is built on upper Fifth Avenue. Traditional carvings, textiles, and leatherwork appear alongside black-and-white photographs by Seydou Keïta. Painted images of Patrice Lumumba represent Africa's postcolonial history. A selection of contemporary art includes Mbongeni Richman Buthelezi's abstract composition made from melted-down pieces of found plastic. Through Sept. 10. (U.B.S. Art Gallery, 1285 Sixth Ave., at 51st St. 212-713-2885.)

"SLOUCHING TOWARDS BETHLEHEM"
Joan Didion's essays on the nineteen-sixties and seventies Zeitgeist collide with Buckminster Fuller's can-do utopianism in this somewhat overdetermined group show. Geodesic domes abound. There's Oscar Tuazon's walk-in version—built of scavenged aluminum and containing a daybed strewn with hippie publications—and Molly Corey's documentary film, in which she interviews her parents about their life in Colorado's Red Rock dome commune. Also among the participants are Rachel Harrison, Jenny Perlin, Michael Phelan, and Jennifer and Kevin McCoy. Through Aug. 21. (The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

"DROP OUT"
The conceit of this summer gathering involves gaps, blanks, and removals, though the title doubtless conveys a certain pleasurable delinquency as well. Oliver Wasow's photographs of whited-out drive-in-movie screens and Chris Sauter's insertion of empty thought bubbles above deadpan shots of grain elevators call forth a certain hot-day-on-the-Great Plains ennui. Oscar Palacio locates a similar void in suburbia, with a board fence absurdly interrupted by a tree, and swatches of sod aimlessly strewn on bare earth. Also included are Charles Cohen, Mel Kendrick, and John O'Reilly. Through Aug. 20. (Julie Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

"THE FINE LINE"
Barely-there drawings, most of them with a geometric-abstract bent. Worked-over Xeroxes from the mid-nineteen-seventies by Carl Andre and Lawrence Weiner explore a quiet serialism, as do Wolfgang Laib's brighter but no less minimal drawings in yellow and red pastel. Tom Friedman's floor "drawing"—a tidy circle of rose-pink eraser shavings—winks at the larger careers of Laib and Andre. Also included are Sandrine Guérin, John McCracken, Fred Sandback, and Valeska Soares, among others. Through Aug. 27. (Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-255-8450.)

"SUMMER SHOW"
This modestly titled show is a postcard from a place where artists are men and art is heroic, though there are some surprising undertones in the selection of works spanning the last half-century. A subtle election-year commentary can be discerned in Robert Smithson's collaged maps of locations like Afghanistan (from 1967); Richard Long's latter-day druid circle of red, white, gray, and green stones collected in four different American states

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(from 1987); and Joseph Beuys's fat-and-cardboard-box assemblage titled "Electric Power Aggregate" (from 1968). Through Aug. 20. (Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

"FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION NATIONAL MONUMENT"
The giant bright-red megaphone designed by Laurie Hawkinson, John Malpede, and Erika Rothenberg—first shown in Battery Park City as part of the "Art on the Beach" program in 1984—is being installed in Foley Square for election season. It looks like Soviet agitprop, but its spirit is pure First Amendment: visitors are invited to climb up six feet to the speaker's platform and declaim whatever they wish. This can be a deflating experience, however, since the megaphone does little to amplify speakers' voices. Opens Aug. 17. (Foley Sq., at the intersection of Pearl and Centre Sts.)

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

"AMERICAN IDYLL"
Public sculpture from a new generation of artists pokes fun at the gravity of its ancestors. Dave McKenzie's towering Paul Bunyan, copied from one in Rumford, Maine, transposes a rural roadside attraction to urban public art. Pentti Monkkonen's silly sculpture of pigeons perched on an angular yellow structure, "French Fry in the Sky," deflates the austerity of minimalist monuments. John Conner's group of dogs leaping for Frisbees is frozen in a joyous whirlwind, Amy Gartrell's "Wishing Well" is too tall for tossing in coins, and Roman de Salvo sends up East Coast battlefield monuments with a cannon that works as a seesaw and shoots water out both ends. Through Sept. 30. (MetroTech Center, Myrtle Ave. between Jay St. and Flatbush Ave.)

"BUSH LEAGUE"
The spirit of Michael Moore looms over this show, which lambastes the Bushes, *père et fils*. Some of the work addresses policy, like Ivan Navarro's "You Sit, You Die," a beach chair made of fluorescent tubes with a scroll listing the names of people executed by electric chair in Florida. Others simply imagine politicos in compromising positions, as in Joan Linder's ink-on-paper drawings of Bush, Cheney, Ashcroft, Rumsfeld, and Rice cowering in their underwear. Through Sept. 6. (Roebling Hall, 390 Wythe Ave. 718-599-5352.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

RUDY BURCKHARDT
A small but moving show of art-world portraits and cityscapes taken between the thirties and the fifties by the Swiss-born filmmaker and photographer, who died in 1999. Pictures of New York City landmarks—the Flatiron Building, Astor Place—hang beside portraits of artists such as Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Jackson Pollack, and Mark Rothko. Through Sept. 11. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave. 212-262-5050.)

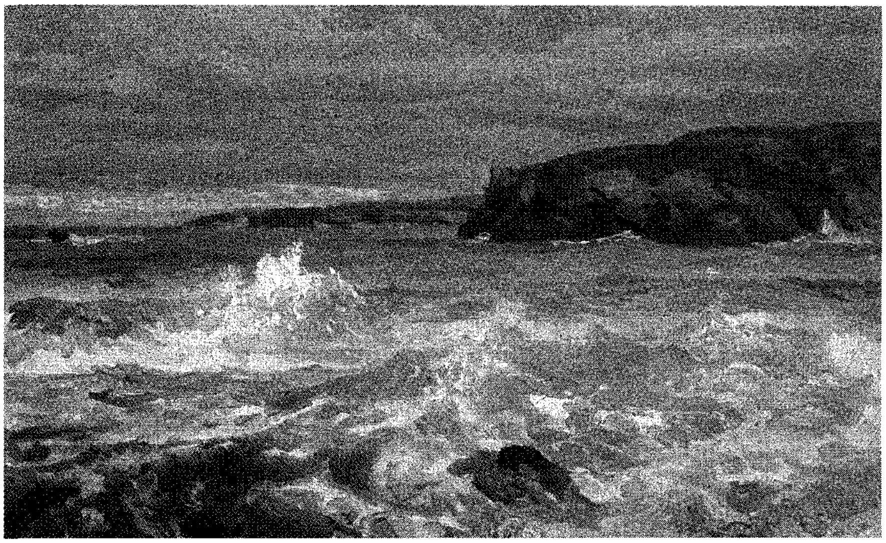
MARIANA COOK
Ten large black-and-white abstractions that show the influence of Cook's teacher Ansel Adams: swimming-pool tiles quivering underwater, a striped vase shot from above, flowers wrapped in plastic. In Cook's hands, an eggplant could be a volcanic island seen from a plane. Through Aug. 20. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave. 212-744-7400.)

CHIP HOOPER
Using a large-format view camera, Hooper takes extraordinarily detailed photographs of the interaction between water and light along the Pacific Ocean. In some pictures the waves roil and fog blocks out the sun, creating a virtually unified field of gray. In others, the sun on still water makes a block of light that falls in a hard line into the ocean. Through Sept. 18. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave. 212-989-7600.)

EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE
Fifteen collotype plates from the famous edition of "Animal Locomotion," published in 1887. The plates contain between twelve and thirty-six images produced with a technique that, Muybridge claimed, made it possible to analyze movement in a manner unavailable to the naked eye. The ones shown here were chosen because they depict athletic events associated with the Olympics. Men run to and away from Muybridge's camera, vault over a pole, jump, and throw punches. The lone woman on view, in a toga (the men are mostly naked), bounces a ball on her tennis racquet, drops it, then coyly picks it up. Through Aug. 20. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930.)

"150 YEARS OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN SPAIN"
A retrospective of Spanish photography, organized chronologically, from mid-nineteenth-century portraits of Gypsies and a sad-looking father holding his dead son (a typical memento mori of the time) to photojournalism documenting the shift to democracy in the seventies and more recent work (a nude by Toni Catany and a picture of a bored priest at an outdoor confession, by Christina García Rodero) that wouldn't have been allowed while Franco was in power. The best pictures cover the Spanish Civil War and the period ending with his death, in 1975. Much of this work seems to have been inspired by American and European innovators, but in some cases—Francisco Ontañón's wedding portrait from 1960, which brings Diane Arbus to mind—the Spaniards' photographs predate and equal the best work of the masters. Through Aug. 27. (Instituto Cervantes, 211 E. 49th St. 212-308-7720.)

"SIX FROM THE SEVENTIES"
More than fifty prints by six photographers whose work exemplifies many of the key artistic ideas of the nineteen-seventies. A large print on vinyl from 1977 by Bea Nettles merges oddly colored images of dinnerware and the moon with her own body, beating the postmodernists to the punch. Joel Meyerowitz's Manhattan street scenes—made with the early color dye-transfer process—combine Harry Callahan's city compositions with Philip-Lorca diCorcia's urban anomie. Frank Gohlke's tiny buildings and Michael Bishop's painted cinder blocks and billboards will speak to fans of Todd Hido and James Welling, while Michael Martone's autobiographical studies will be liked by admirers of Nan Goldin. William Larson's spare, even undercooked prints made on an early fax-like machine anticipate today's digital collages. Through Aug. 20. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)



Seascapes by William Trost Richards at the National Academy Museum.

Short List

"BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE"
International Center of Photography, 1133 Sixth Ave. 212-857-0000; Asia Society, 725 Park Ave. 212-288-6400. Through Sept. 4.

"DO"
Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999. Through Aug. 31.

"POOL PARTY"
Milo, 552 W. 24th St. 212-414-0370. Through Aug. 20.

"WILD FLOWERS"
Meyerowitz, 120 Eleventh Ave. 212-414-2770. Through Aug. 20.

CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL
Aug. 17-18 at 8: The violinist Christian Tetzlaff and the violist Tabea Zimmermann join the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra (conducted by the superb Bernard Labadie) for an all-Mozart program that includes the Sinfonia Concertante in E-Flat Major and the Symphony No. 39. ♦ Aug. 18 at 10:30: In "A Little Night Music," Tetzlaff and Zimmermann head up to the Kaplan Penthouse to offer a nightcap of music by Mozart (the romantic Duos for Violin and Viola) and Hindemith. ♦ Aug. 19 at 8: Thomas Dausgaard brings his Swedish Chamber Orchestra to town for a concert of music by Kraus, Mozart (the Piano Concerto No. 17 in G Major, with Emanuel Ax), and Beethoven (the Fourth Symphony). ♦ Aug. 20-21 at 8: Louis Langrée, the festival's energetic young music director, leads the festival orchestra in Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 and Sarasate's "Zigeunerweisen"—both with Joshua Bell—along with Kodály's "Dances of Galánta." ♦ Aug. 24-25 at 8: Labadie and the festival orchestra return (with the formidable pianist Garrick Ohlsson) to perform favorites by Haydn (the Symphony No. 103, "Drum Roll") and Beethoven (the Fourth Piano Concerto) along with a Mozart rarity (the Chaconne from "Idomeneo"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500. For a complete schedule, see www.lincolncenter.org.)

BARGEMUSIC
Aug. 19-20 at 7:30: The violinist Weigang Li, the pianist Kioyshi Tamagawa, and other musicians gather to perform works by Mozart, Tcherepnin, and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in G Minor). ♦ Aug. 21 at 7:30: In the first of two concerts by the Williams Chamber Players, piano trios by Haydn and Mendelssohn (in C Minor, Op. 66) bookend a selection of contemporary works offered by the West Point Saxophone Quartet. ♦ Aug. 22 at 4: The

Players return to repeat the program on their own, adding a performance of Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Piano to the Haydn and Mendelssohn pieces. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

OUT OF TOWN

BRIDGEHAMPTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Aug. 18 at 7:30: Marya Martin, the flutist and director of this impressive series, knows how to get tautly fashioned performances from her players and how much spice her audiences can take. In this concert, offered by (among others) the pianist Jeremy Denk and the cellist Clive Greensmith (of the Tokyo String Quartet), Chen Yi's "Sound of the Five," which peppers the richly Schubertian lineup of the string quintet with cello with imitations of the sounds of Chinese folk instruments, is nestled between familiar works by Beethoven and Schumann (the Quintet for Piano and Strings). ♦ Aug. 21 at 7:30: Eric Ewazen's "Mosaics for Flute, Bassoon, and Marimba" is a prelude for two French masterworks, the Quartet No. 2 in G Minor for Piano and Strings, by Fauré, and Franck's Piano Quintet in F Minor. (Presbyterian Church, Bridgehampton, N.Y. 631-537-6368. These are the final performances of the season.)

TANGLEWOOD

Aug. 18 at 8:30: Dawn Upshaw lends her luminous soprano to Oslvado Golijov's "Ayre," in a program with the Boston Symphony Chamber Players that also features instrumental music by Rossini and Dvořák (the bumptious String Quintet with Double Bass). ♦ Aug. 19 at 8:30: This week's schedule is dominated by the violinist Christian Tetzlaff and the pianist Lars Vogt, two young musicians who uphold the best German traditions of scrupulous and perceptive musicianship. Brahms's three Sonatas for Violin and Piano—which they have recorded, wonderfully—form the program for their duo concert. ♦ Aug. 20 at 8:30: Vogt, a player of dark and unforgiving expressivity, goes it alone in Beethoven's Concerto No. 1 in C Major, in a Boston Symphony Orchestra concert that also features music by Mendelssohn and Schumann (the Fourth Symphony); Andrey Boreyko conducts. ♦ Aug. 21 at 8:30: In another all-Brahms program, Tetzlaff teams up with the cellist Claudio Bohórquez in the Double Concerto; Boreyko also leads the B.S.O. in the "Tragic" Overture and the Symphony No. 2 in D Major. ♦ Aug. 22 at 2:30: James DePreist conducts the young virtuosi of the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra in works by Beethoven (the Piano Concerto No. 4, with Garrick Ohlsson) and Mahler (the First Symphony). ♦ Aug. 23 at 8:30: The Broadway star Kristin Chenoweth headlines a concert with Keith Lockhart and the Boston Pops. (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA

Aug. 19 at 8: Handel's **"Imeneo,"** with John Tessier, Michael Maniaci, Amanda Pabyan, and Craig Phillips; William Lacey conducts. ♦ Aug. 20 at 8 and Aug. 24 at 2: Tazewell Thompson's production of **"Patience,"** Gilbert and Sullivan's sendup of the airs and vapors of Oscar Wilde's aesthetic movement, features Sarah Coburn, Jeffrey Lentz, Kevin Burdette, and Joyce Castle; Andrew Bisantz. ♦ Aug. 21 at 1:30 and Aug. 23 at 2: A winning production of Puccini's **"La Fanciulla del West"** (the most underrated of his operas) features Emily Pulley, Roger Honeywell, and Earle Patriarco; Stewart Robertson. ♦ Aug. 22 at 2: Richard Rodney Bennett may be best known these days as one of Manhattan's leading cabaret pianists, but he's also a distinguished classical composer; **"The Mines of Sulphur,"** *a murder mystery set in a country* house in eighteenth-century England, went on to La Scala after its successful London première in 1965. The cast includes Caroline Worra, Beth Clayton, Brandon Jovanovich, and James Maddalena; Robertson. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255. These are the final performances of the season.)

BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL: "SHOSTAKOVICH AND HIS WORLD"

Dmitri Shostakovich has been the big man on campus at Bard all summer. This festival, following on the heels of Bard Summerscape, concentrates on his music and that of his contemporaries and successors. Aug. 20 at 8: "Good Morning Moscow: One Day in the Life of Soviet Popular Music," a radio-style program devised by Marina Kostalevsky. ♦ Aug. 21 at 10 A.M.: In "Music as Politics," Richard Taruskin, the perennially controversial academician and expert on Russian music, will offer commentary on a performance of "Antiformalist Rayok" (with the bass Nikita Storojev), an anti-Stalin satire based in Russian carnival traditions. ♦ Aug. 21 at 1:30: "In the Shadow of 1948," a concert featuring music by Shostakovich (including the richly symphonic Fifth String Quartet), Sviridov, and Galina Ustvolskaya (one of Shostakovich's favorite students) performed by the Chiara String Quartet, the violinist Philippe Quint, and others. ♦ Aug. 21 at 8: The magnificent Polish contralto Ewa Podleś is featured in "After the Thaw," a concert of music by Shostakovich ("The Execution of Stepan Razin") and Mussorgsky ("Songs and Dances of Death"); Leon Botstein conducts the American Symphony Orchestra. ♦ Aug. 22 at 1:30: "A New Generation Responds," *music by Shostakovich (the Viola Sonata) and some* of his more illustrious younger colleagues (Schnittke, Denisov, Tishchenko, and Gubaidulina), performed by the pianist Lydia Artymiw, the soprano Courtenay Budd, and others. ♦ Aug. 22 at 5: The weekend's final event, an evening of two Shostakovich patriotic works (including "The Song of the Forests") along with the powerful Tenth Symphony, performed by Botstein, the A.S.O., and the Bard Festival Chorale, among others. (Olin Hall and Sosnoff Theatre, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. For a full schedule of concerts, symposia, and pre-concert talks, see www.summerscape.bard.edu.)

WINDHAM CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

This hardy little series, a comparatively recent addition to the Hudson Valley's rich musical offerings, was founded by the husband-and-wife team of Magdalena Golczewski and Robert Manno, who met at the Met when she was a violinist in the orchestra and he was a chorus baritone. Golczewski formed the Windham Trio with two old Met colleagues, the cellist David Heiss and the pianist John Churchwell, who perform Cécile Chaminade's Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 11, on a program that also includes Manno's Sonata for Cello and Piano. (Windham Performing Arts Center, Windham, N.Y. 518-734-6378. Aug. 21 at 8.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL: "LES IDÉES HEUREUSES"

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is remembered as a philosopher, but he was a composer as well, working in a style of elegant simplicity that was of a piece with his general outlook on life. Two "Airs de Colette," from "Le Devin du Village" (a work that the Paris Opéra kept in its repertory for sixty years), are performed in an evening of Baroque music and dance with the Montreal early-music ensemble (featuring the soprano Suzie LeBlanc), which closes the festival's season. (Routes 44 and 272, Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000. Aug. 21 at 8.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS

Aug. 21 at 8: Alexander Platt conducts "Mahler Revisited," a program featuring Schoenberg's chamber version of Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde." (See This Week.) ♦ Aug. 22 at 3: The young cellist Zuill Bailey, a regular at Brooklyn's Bargemusic series, performs an intriguing recital of solo suites by Bach (Nos. 3-4), Britten, and Ned Rorem ("After Reading Shakespeare"). (Woodstock, N.Y. For more information, call 845-679-8217.)

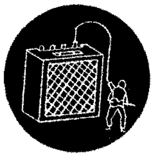
MUSIC MOUNTAIN

The pianist Roberto Hidalgo and the bassist Alvin Brehm join the Avalon String Quartet for a program of Wolf, Bartók (the Second Quartet), and Schubert (the "Trout" Quintet). (Routes 63 and 126, Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126. Aug. 22 at 3.)

JUILLIARD ARTISTS IN CONCERT

The free lunchtime series, a showcase for the school's young virtuosi, presents the violinist Janet Sung and the pianist Robert Koenig in music by Stravinsky (the "Suite Italienne") and Fauré (the Violin Sonata No. 1 in A Major). (180 Maiden Lane. Aug. 24 at 12:30. No tickets required.)

POP NOTES



POPPING BACK UP

For more than fifteen years, Glenn Tilbrook was a mainstay of the British group Squeeze, which emerged from the late punk era to record some of the cleverest and most carefully observed pop songs of the eighties. But he and his former writing partner, Chris Difford, have been slow starters as solo artists. Difford's début, "I Didn't Get Where I Am," came out earlier this year to mixed reviews. Tilbrook released "The Incomplete Glenn Tilbrook" in 2001 and now has a second record, **"Transatlantic Ping Pong"** (Compass). While it's not quite a Squeeze record, it's not quite anything else. Tilbrook's sweet tenor is pushed to the front of the songs, which are pleasantly Beatle-esque compositions with the occasional jazz or country decoration. Without Difford's gruff and tuneless counterpoint, Tilbrook's vocals can be winningly (or annoyingly) unironic. To say that the record is predictable is not necessarily faint praise: Tilbrook has practiced this kind of thing long enough to be nearly perfect at it. A few of the songs ("Hot Shaved Asian Teens," "Genitalia of a Fool") rely on a raciness that probably seemed daring on paper but is just silly on record. And while the chorus of "Reinventing the Wheel" may be about masturbation, it's a perfectly good metaphor for Tilbrook's pop career: "I'm not reinventing the wheel / I just like the way that it makes me feel."

Neil and Tim Finn are, in a sense, the Difford and Tilbrook of New Zealand. Both in groups (Split Enz, Crowded House) and as solo acts, the brothers have created almost three decades' worth of sophisticated pop, usually powered by Neil's soaring, sentimental vocals. On **"Everyone Is Here"** (Nettwerk), the Finn brothers are as they were: vaguely emotional, well produced, consistently pretty, and not especially compelling. Nothing here offends the ear, but nothing awakens the mind, either—the close-harmony lament for a lost sibling intimacy, "Disembodied Voices," comes nearest, if only because it's hard to read its title as anything other than an apology.

—*Ben Greenman*

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"CHANG IN A VOID MOON"

The experimental director John Jesurun's avant soap opera continues its fifty-five-episode, twenty-two-year history with a series of marathon readings that begins with the first episode and concludes with a new installment set at the Republican National Convention. "Chang" began as a weekly serial at the Pyramid Club in 1982, and it features a cast of bizarre characters, like the evil Dr. Sabartés, a prominent scientist and lobotomist. The plots are full of surrealistic mayhem, including the unsolved murder of Santa Claus and the destruction of half of Chicago. A number of gifted downtown performers, including Steve Buscemi, John Kelly, Black-Eyed Susan, and Anna Kohler, have been a part of the show, and many veterans are scheduled to read. The readings will be interspersed with the cabaret rock of the Brooklyn-based multilingual ensemble Barbez. Part of the Howl! Festival. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-868-4444. Aug. 19-21 at 7.)

MORE READINGS

Aug. 18 at 8:30: The poets Janet Kaplan and Jennifer L. Knox read from their contributions to the latest issue of the literary journal *Open City*. Stacy Pershall will also read a piece, about her night in Bellevue Hospital, and Greg Purcell will read from his poetry. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Aug. 20 at 7: Jasper Fforde offers selections from his latest mystery, "Something Rotten." (Partners & Crime, 44 Greenwich Ave. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Aug. 22 at 9:30: The Howl! Festival's "All Star Poetry Jam," featuring Moby, Suzanne Vega, Carl Hancock Rux, Ed Sanders, Edwin Torres, and others. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

MOVIES OPENING

ALMOST PEACEFUL
Michel Deville directed this drama about a group of Jewish garment workers in Paris who are trying to reëstablish the rhythms of their work and life after the Second World War. In French. Opening Aug. 20. (Paris.)

BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS
An adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's novel "Vile Bodies," about a group of young aristocrats in nineteen-thirties England. Directed by Stephen Fry. With Stephen Campbell Moore, Emily Mortimer, Jim Broadbent, and Stockard Channing. Opening Aug. 20. (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, and Cinema 1.)

END OF THE CENTURY: THE STORY OF THE RAMONES
Michael Gramaglia and Jim Fields directed this documentary about the seminal punk band from Forest Hills, Queens. Opening Aug. 20.

EXORCIST: THE BEGINNING
A prequel to the 1973 horror film, with Stellan Skarsgård, James D'Arcy, and Izabella Scorupco. Renny Harlin directed. Opening Aug. 20.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ALLEN GINSBERG
A documentary directed by Jerry Aronson that fellows the Beat poet through the decades and phases of his life. Opening Aug. 18. (Cinema Village.)

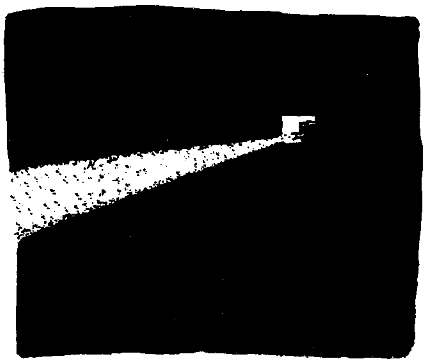
MEAN CREEK
A gang of kids attempts to humiliate a bully on a birthday-party rafting trip, in a thriller directed by Jacob Aaron Estes. With Rory Culkin and Trevor Morgan. Opening Aug. 20.

NICOTINA
Hugo Rodriguez directed this heist film involving a hacker, the Russian Mafia, and diamonds. With Diego Luna. In Spanish. Opening Aug. 20.

Rafael Inclán and Diego Luna star in Hugo Rodriguez's thriller "Nicotina."

ROSENSTRASSE
Margarethe von Trotta directed this period drama based on the true story of a group of non-Jewish wives in Berlin who protected their Jewish husbands from deportation. With Katja Riemann and Maria Schrader. In German. Opening Aug. 20. (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

UNCOVERED: THE WAR IN IRAQ
Robert Greenwald ("Outfoxed") directed this documentary that examines the Bush Administration's reasoning for the Iraq war through interviews with intelligence officers, diplomats, and other government officials. Opening Aug. 20.



WITHOUT A PADDLE
Matthew Lillard, Dax Shepard, and Seth Green play three city-slicker friends who go on a canoe trip, in a comedy directed by Steven Brill. Opening Aug. 20.

FILM NOTES

BEFORE SUNSET
A lovely sequel to "Before Sunrise," the charmingly diminutive romantic movie that Richard Linklater made in 1995, in which Jesse (Ethan Hawke), a footloose young American, and Celine (Julie Delpy), a French student, spent a night together in Vienna. Nine years have gone by, and Jesse, now a novelist, is hawking a book in Paris, where he runs into Celine, who has become an earnest international health worker. Jesse is supposed to fly home later that day, but they agree to walk around the Left Bank. Like the earlier movie, "Before Sunset" turns into an orgy of talk—flirtatious, soulful, boastful, self-deprecating talk, some of it borderline pretentious but all of it utterly convincing as the intelligent and foolish things said by people who connect through their tastes, ideas, and passions. The drama emerges from the movie's form: it plays in real time, and for about eighty minutes, as Linklater's camera gravely follows these two around, we wonder whether Jesse will go home to his wife and child or allow himself to be fascinated, once again, by a serious young woman given to melancholy self-revelation.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/5/04.) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

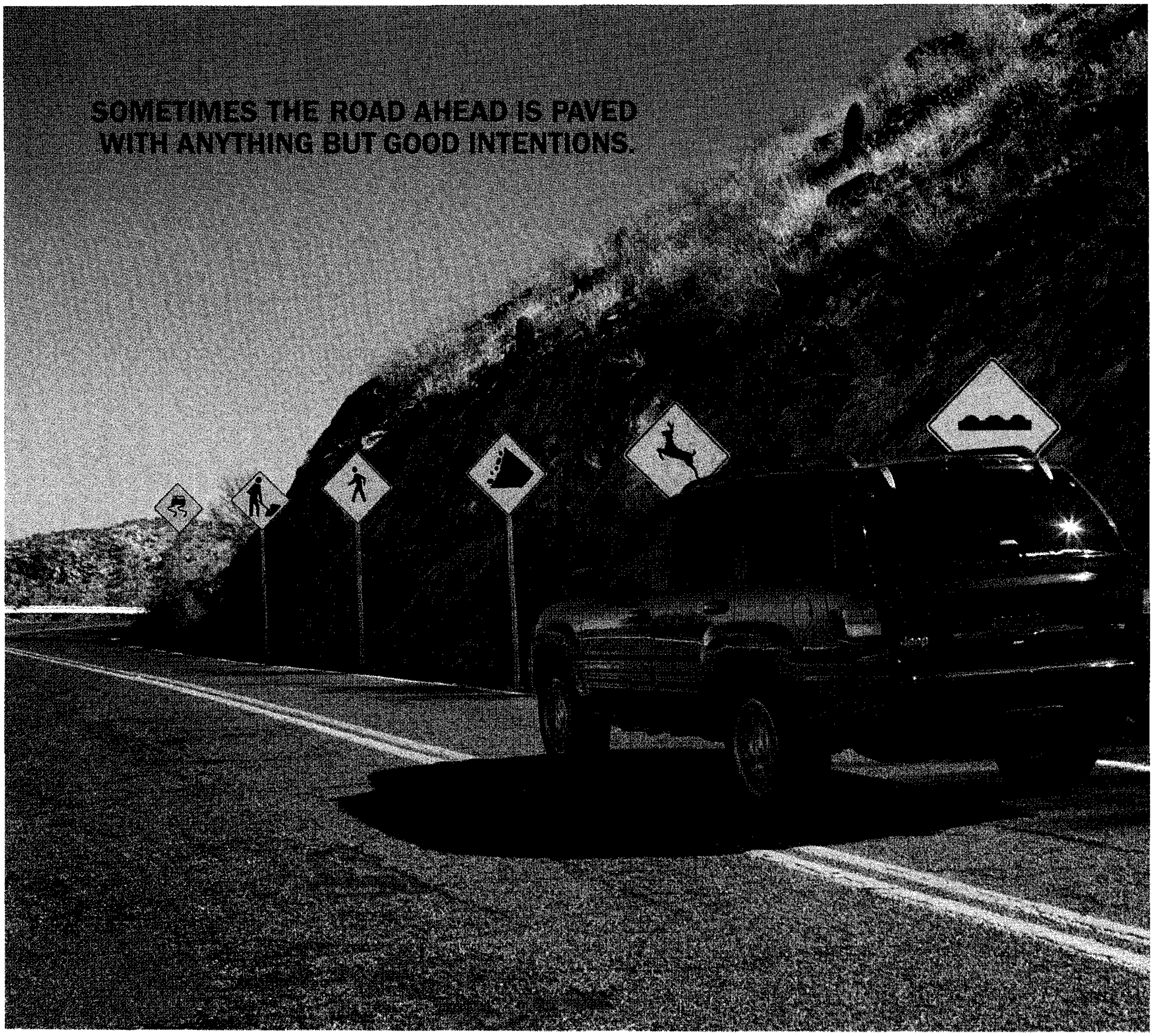
THE BLIND SWORDSMAN: ZATOICHI
The television personality, movie star, director, and best-selling author Takeshi (Beat) Kitano reincarnates the character of Zatoichi, a beloved figure in Japanese pop culture. Sightless, Zatoichi wanders the countryside seeking work as a humble masseur, cutting down evildoers when they cross his path. The movie is not without its crude pleasures, such as watching the near-comatose Zatoichi suddenly step into action, becoming a human Cuisinart. And there is also a trippy strangeness to the whole production: gags when you least expect them, an exuberant dance number at the end, some wild synthesizer music. But Kitano, with his slapped-together filmmaking, is relying heavily on the built-in affection for his hero. In Japanese.—*Michael Agger* (Angelika Film Center, Empire 25, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE BOURNE SUPREMACY
Fast, faster, and fastest—that's the way the cutting rate goes in this sequel to "The Bourne Identity." The director, Paul Greengrass, jumps ahead within scenes, then jumps again. Greengrass is like a man breathing so fast that he never draws much oxygen into his lungs. Yet, of its kind, "The Bourne Supremacy" is incredibly skilled. Greengrass arranges pursuits and escapes that fly like arrows. He tears up staid old Moscow in a car chase and turns routine C.I.A. procedural stuff—people looking at computer screens and barking code names and other gibberish at each other—into nerve-racking contests of will. The movie is stripped down for action, and its hero—the survivor of a botched operation who suffers from amnesia—has no identity beyond his superlative physical skills and a vague sense of guilt. Harried, chased, both hunted and hunter, the blunt-nosed Matt Damon is a superhero reduced to pure reflex, yet, by means of his isolation and his stoicism, he becomes almost a romantic figure. Set in Goa, Naples, Berlin, Moscow, and, should you blink, perhaps Madagascar and Sardinia, too. With Joan Allen, Brian Cox, Julia Stiles, and Franke Potente. Adapted by Tony Gilroy from a Robert Ludlum novel.—*D.D.* (8/9 & 16/04) (Battery Park 11, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

COLLATERAL
Tom Cruise as an assassin in a silver-gray suit shows up in Los Angeles at dawn and expects to leave at dusk. His job: to eliminate five witnesses in an impending federal prosecution of a drug cartel. He bullies a sweet-tempered taxi-driver, one Max Durocher (Jamie Foxx), into providing transportation all through the night, and "Collateral" turns into a kind of convoluted buddy movie, in which the two men engage in a weird, terse dialogue about murder. The plot of "Collateral," which was directed by Michael Mann, is just a movie-ish contrivance, and the violence is no more than thuggishly casual and chic—that is, very enjoyable. But shot by shot, scene by scene, Mann may be the best director in Hollywood. Methodical and precise, he analyzes a scene into minute components—a door closing, an arm thrust out—and gathers the fragments into seamless units; he wants you to live inside the physical event, not just experience the sensation of it. "Collateral" comes off like clockwork, but it's a clock that breathes—great actors like Mark Ruffalo, Javier Bardem, and Barry Shabaka Henley have sustained, intricate moments in the pauses between the violent acts. With Jada Pinkett Smith. Written by Stuart Beattie. Shot largely with digital cameras by Dion Beebe and Paul Cameron.—*D.D.* (8/9 & 16/04) (Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE DOOR IN THE FLOOR
Tod Williams's adaptation of the first third of John Irving's novel "A Widow for One Year" has an aura of quiet intensity and lacerating intimacy. Ted Cole (Jeff Bridges), a successful children's-book writer and illustrator, and his wife, Marion (Kim Basinger), are both held together and separated by the death of their teen-age boys, some years ago, in an accident. Ted deals with his grief by boozing, sleeping around,

ZOHAR LAZAR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WITH ANYTHING BUT GOOD INTENTIONS.

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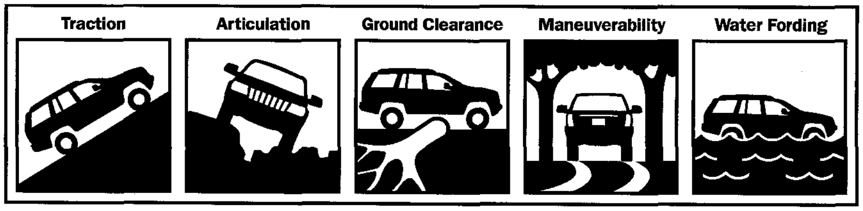
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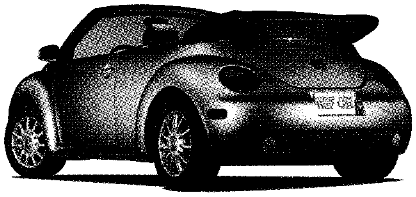

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and generally acting like a bear in a garbage dump. Marion, for her part, has become dead to her husband and to their four-year-old daughter. Eddie (Jon Foster), a pale and lanky sixteen-year-old, enters this disintegrating marriage as an assistant to Ted; his real job, we understand, is to sleep with the zombie Marion. Eddie, it seems, reminds her of one of the dead sons, and Ted thinks that this teen-ager will bring his wife back to life—or something like that. Psychologically, the material is half-senseless and rather unappealing, and the movie drifts into inconsequence.—*D.D.* (7/26/04) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, Empire 25, and Lincoln Square.)

EUROPA, EUROPA

Agnieszka Holland created the only Holocaust movie that simultaneously tickles the funny bone and stings the heart. Set in Germany and Poland, it tells the factual, astonishing war story of a Jewish Everyboy named Solomon Perel, who, in order to survive, somersaults this way and that—from refugee to Bolshevik-in-training—and lands in the élite school for Hitler Youth. The movie starts with Solly's bris, then jumps ahead to his bar Mitzvah day, on the eve of the Second World War. The hero's *penis is the movie's center of emotion, as well as its* source of seriocomic tension and suspense—Solly must always hide his member from prying Aryan eyes. When he finds a girlfriend who's delightful except for her Nazi fanaticism (she's played by the marvellous Julie Delpy), he yearns for an intimacy that circumstance and circumcision make impossible. As he tries out different roles, Solly becomes a scary parody of a teen-ager figuring out what sort of adult he can become. Holland's handling of Marco Hofschneider in the lead role is a triumph of sympathy and tact. Together, they create a unique character—a not-so-candid Candide. Originally released in 1991. In German, Russian, Polish, and Hebrew.—*Michael Sragow* (Thalia Theatre; Aug. 21.)

THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Physically, it's a milestone. No producer in the decades since has assembled as vast an ocean of extras or as stunning an acreage of plaster as Samuel Bronston did in his Spanish studio—and no director in Bronston's stable could make better use of it than Anthony Mann. Back in the culturally aspiring movie world of 1964, it was possible to film the same basic story as "Gladiator" and actually have the dying Emperor Marcus Aurelius use a phrase like "Pax Romana." Alec Guinness plays Aurelius as a weary—dare we say stoic?—intellectual who wants a Roman peace that all foreigners can join not as slaves or clients but as citizens. Unfortunately for Aurelius, but perhaps fortunately for audiences, Aurelius' successor, Commodus, played here by the flamboyant Christopher Plummer, forsakes the Pax Romana and turns Rome into an empire of camp. Sophia Loren ups the entertainment level as Aurelius' daughter, especially when the dashing, heroic Stephen Boyd makes her feel like a vestal virgin again. The best of the second-unit director Yakima Canutt's many coups is a mountainside chariot demolition derby for Plummer and Boyd which rivals the Colosseum race that Boyd was part of in "Ben-Hur" (also stage-managed by the great Canutt).—*M.S.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Aug. 20.)

THE GARDEN OF THE FINZI-CONTINIS

Vittorio De Sica's lyric evocation of a vanished group of people (the cultivated, aristocratic Jewish-Italian landowners) and a vanished mood. Based on Giorgio Bassani's semiautobiographical novel, the film records how Giorgio, a middle-class outsider (Lino Capolicchio), is drawn into the decaying, enchanted world of the Finzi-Continis by the imperious, contrary Micòl (Dominique Sanda); she and her languid brother (Helmut Berger) are spoiled, beautiful people without the will to save themselves. This extraordinary film, with its melancholy glamour, is perhaps the only one that records the half-hearted anti-Jewish measures of the Mussolini period—which were, however, sufficient to wipe out the Finzi-Continis and all they represent. Originally released in 1970. In Italian.—*Pauline Kael* (Thalia Theatre; Aug. 21.)

GARDEN STATE

Andrew Largeman (Zach Braff), a struggling actor, arrives in his native New Jersey with some extra baggage: his paraplegic mother has possibly committed suicide, he's been on Zoloft since forever, and his one major acting credit is as a retarded quarterback. This would be a difficult burden for any young man, let alone a début movie. But Braff, who also wrote and directed, keeps the tone light with some very funny homecoming scenes. There's a party where Large is greeted as "Jersey's De Niro," a run-in with a high-school friend turned cop, and, like a winning bass line, the smirking wit of his stoner friend Mark (Peter Sarsgaard). The movie is also lifted by the presence of Natalie Portman, perhaps the ultimate ethereal home-town girl. Braff eventually takes the movie to emotional places where only the extremely tenderhearted will follow, but there are a lot of nice moments that resonate, and a beautiful soundtrack of moody, interior music.—*M.A.* (Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

HAROLD & KUMAR GO TO WHITE CASTLE

A stoner comedy starring "persons of colors." Harold (John Cho) is a Korean investment banker, and his best friend, Kumar (Kal Penn), is a South Asian slacker avoiding medical school. The talky script presents white people as an ethnic group like any other, *worthy of mockery (extreme-sports guys) and praise* (John Hughes movies). Despite that innovation, Harold and Kumar encounter the usual teen-movie setups, right down to the encounter with the faded television celebrity (Neil Patrick Harris, a.k.a. Doogie Howser, M.D.). The movie is worth seeing for its manhandling of political correctness and Penn's irreverent charisma—just don't expect a revolution. Directed by Danny Leiner, whose previous effort was the Brechtian drama "Dude, Where's My Car?"—*M.A.* (Battery Park 11, Chelsea West, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

I, ROBOT

It's Will Smith versus the machines in this extremely loose adaptation of a series of Isaac Asimov stories. Directed by the fantasist Alex Proyas ("Dark City," "The Crow"), the movie is a C.G.I. extravaganza, full of gleaming surfaces and moody lighting in the manner of Edward Hopper. The robots themselves have beautiful ice-blue eyes, and the Chicago cityscapes have a "Blade Runner"-like intricacy. The studly Smith (he has a swoon-inducing shower scene) suspects that one of the latest models of a new robot line has committed murder, and the plot becomes a succession of chases that are progressively exciting. There's not much in the way of clever dialogue (the dreaded Akiva Goldsman had a hand in the script), but Proyas has a real facility for this kind of speculative storytelling.—*Bruce Diones* (Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE LEOPARD

A sweeping popular epic, with obvious similarities to "Gone with the Wind," and with an almost Chekhovian sensibility. Based on a novel by an impoverished Sicilian prince, it has a hero on a grand scale—Don Fabrizio, Prince of Salina, played superlatively by Burt Lancaster, who acknowledged that he modelled his performance on the nobleman director, Luchino Visconti. The film is set in the eighteen-sixties, when Italy was in the middle of a revolution, but it's essentially about the Prince himself—the aging Leopard—and how he reacts to the social changes. We couldn't be any closer to Lancaster's Prince if we were inside his skin—which in a way we are. We see what he sees, feel what he feels, and, in the last hour, set at a splendid ball that marks the aristocrats' acceptance of the Mafia-dominated parvenus who are taking over their wealth and power, we're inside his mind as he relives his life, experiences regret, and accepts the dying of his class and his own death. It's one of the greatest of all passages in movies. With Alain Delon as the Prince's sly nephew and Claudia Cardinale as a shrewd, sensual heiress. Originally released in 1963. In English and Italian.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Aug. 18-24.)

THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE

The famous original, from 1962, written by George Axelrod, from a Richard Condon novel, and directed by John Frankenheimer, was a satire of Cold

War anxieties that cut both ways, attacking both the far right and the far left. Acidulous and brazenly absurd, the movie was a one-of-a-kind mainstream picture, with startling oddities that people talked about for years. This updated version, written by Daniel Pyne and Dean Georgias and directed by Jonathan Demme, is doggedly, wretchedly earnest. A shadowy big company reminiscent of Halliburton or the Carlyle Group attempts to take over the White House by placing a computer chip in the brain of a war hero turned congressman (Liev Shreiber) who is under the control of his reactionary mother (Meryl Streep), a senator unaccountably made up to look like Hillary Clinton. What was satire of paranoia in the old movie has been turned into just plain paranoia. The bad memories of the hero (Denzel Washington), who suspects that the war hero is a fake, are accompanied by the conventional horror-film frights of painted faces, spooky doctors, and smoky, distorted cinematography. The movie is overwrought and unfocussed, and there isn't a joke in it anywhere.—*D.D.* (8/9 & 16/04) (Battery Park 11, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

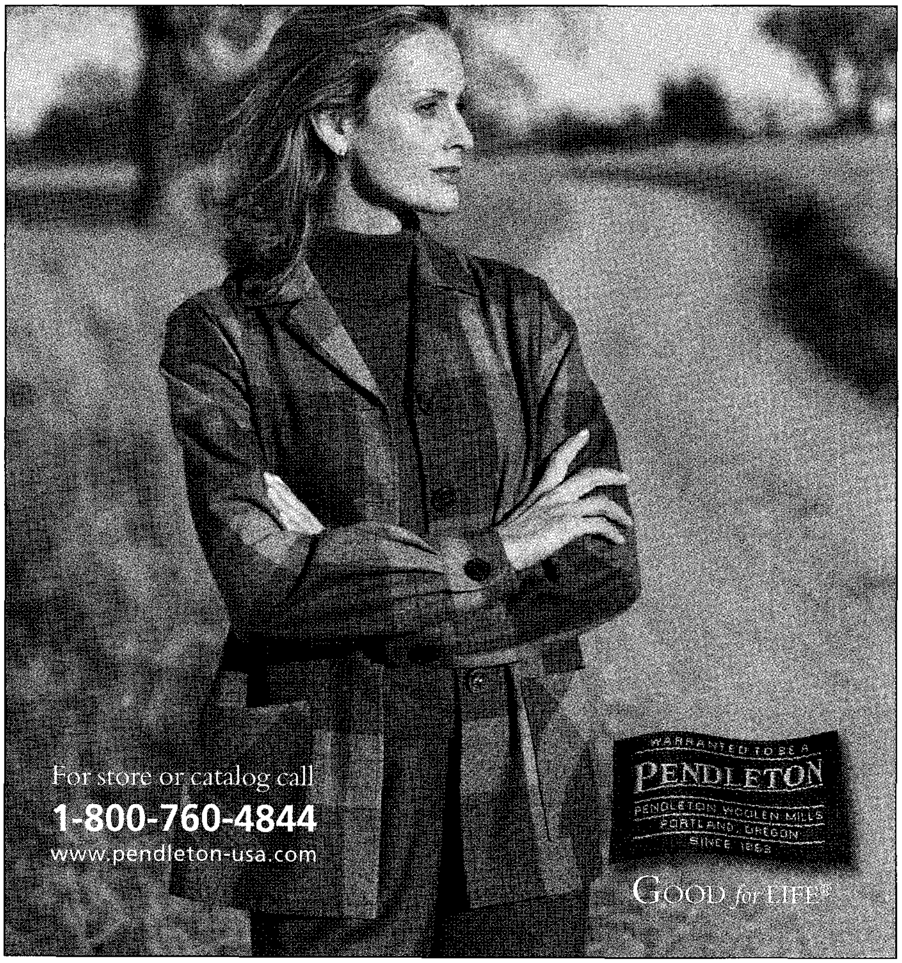
MARIA FULL OF GRACE
In this superbly poised independent film, Maria (Catalina Sandino Moreno), a willful seventeen-year-old, unhappily pregnant and stuck in a factory job, agrees to serve as a "mule," carrying in her stomach little pellets of heroin from her native Colombia to New Jersey. Joshua Marston, a thirty-five-year-old N.Y.U. film-school graduate, nosed around Colombia and New York's immigrant neighborhoods before beginning to shoot "Maria," his first full-length feature, and the way he dramatized the material seems instinctively right: he goes step by step, detail by detail, emotion by emotion, eliding nothing, exaggerating nothing. In his calm and lucid way, Marston has made one of the emblematic coming-to-America stories of our time.—*D.D.* (7/26/04) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinemas 2, East 86th Street Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Sunshine Cinema.)

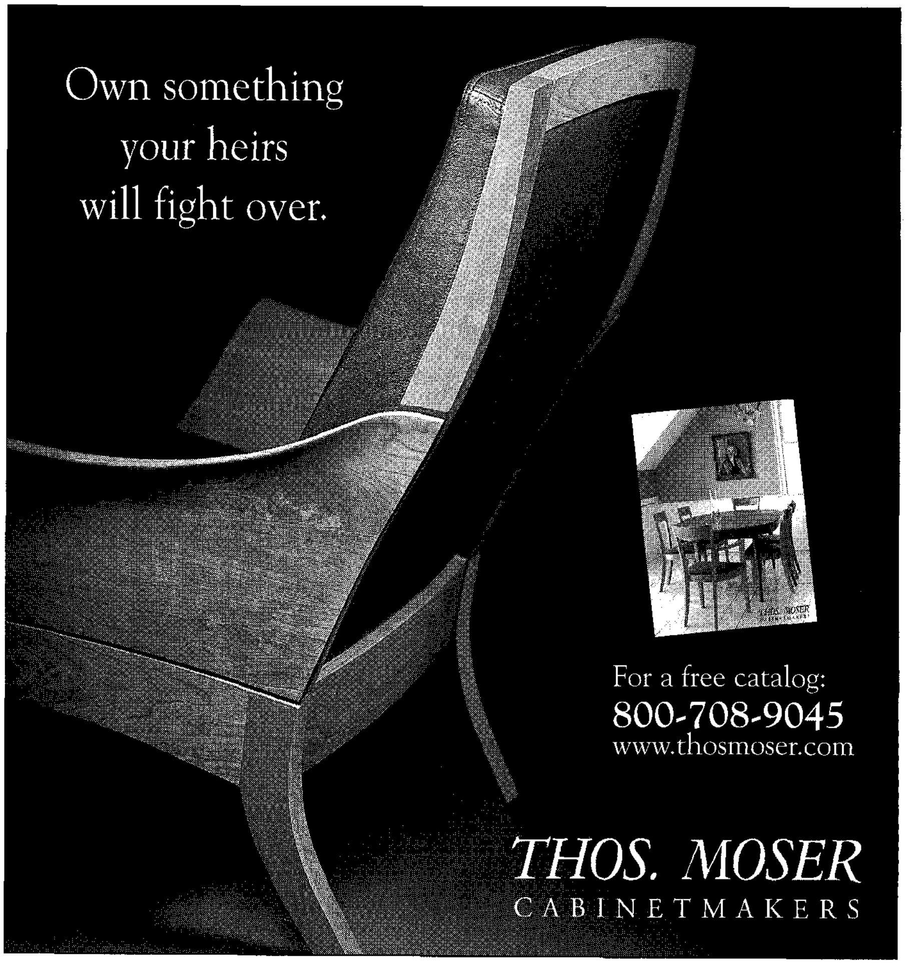
SHE HATE ME
The frenzied new film from Spike Lee, who is appalled and aroused to a new and bewildering degree. We start amid financial scandal, as Jack Armstrong (Anthony Mackie) gets fired from a pharmaceutical company for leaking details of its mismanagement. That promising topic is, however, speedily left behind, as Jack turns, without warning, to the lucrative trade of sperm donation; to be specific, he impregnates professional lesbians for at least five thousand bucks a pop. The movie unstintingly applauds such heavy industry, even morphing into animation for the depiction of our hero's eager sperm; add the spurious departure into Mafia land (complete with a miscast John Turturro), plus a maladroit flashback to the Watergate break-in, and what we wind up with is explicable only as collage—a bright, multifarious jamming together of racial wrath and horny celebration, better known as a complete mess. Perhaps, in an election year, you need to make this much noise to be heard. With Monica Bellucci, Woody Harrelson, Brian Dennehy, and a dirty-mouthed Ellen Barkin.—*Anthony Lane* (8/2/04) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

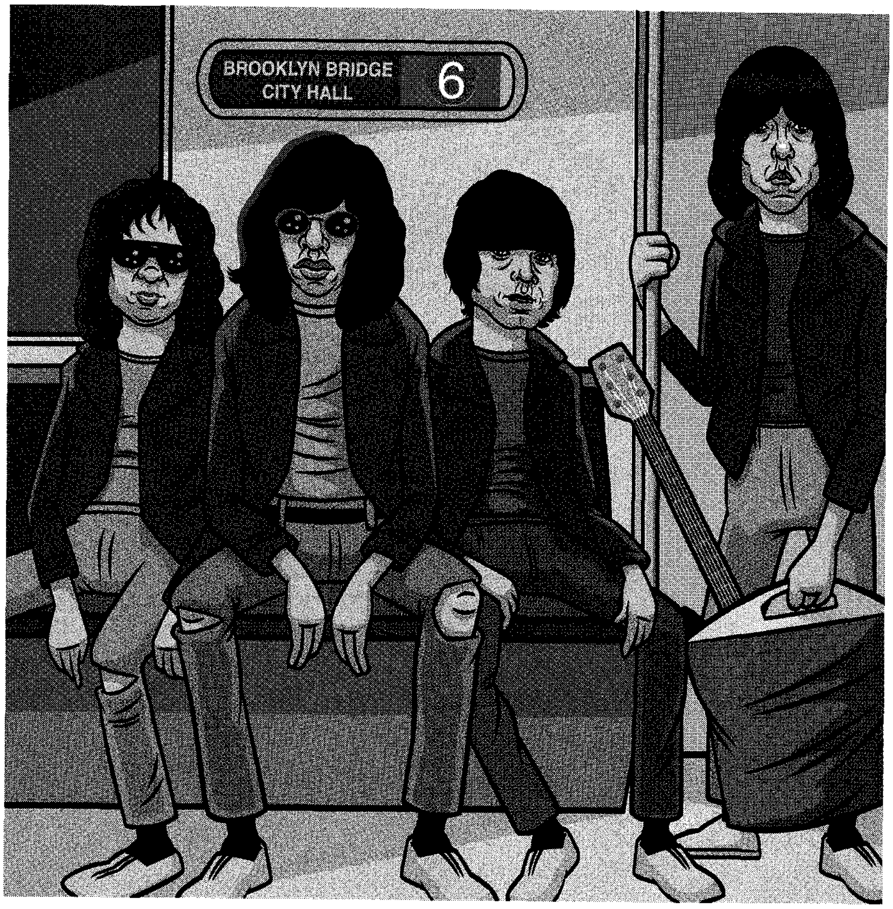
THE VILLAGE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 11, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

ALSO PLAYING

CODE 46
Angelika Film Center.
FAHRENHEIT 9/11 (6/28/04)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Battery Park 11, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.







"End of the Century: The Story of the Ramones," opening August 20.

MICHAEL WELDON

INTIMATE STRANGERS
Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.
SPIDER-MAN 2 (7/12 & 19/04)
Battery Park 11, Chelsea West, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.
WE DON'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE
Cinema 1, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

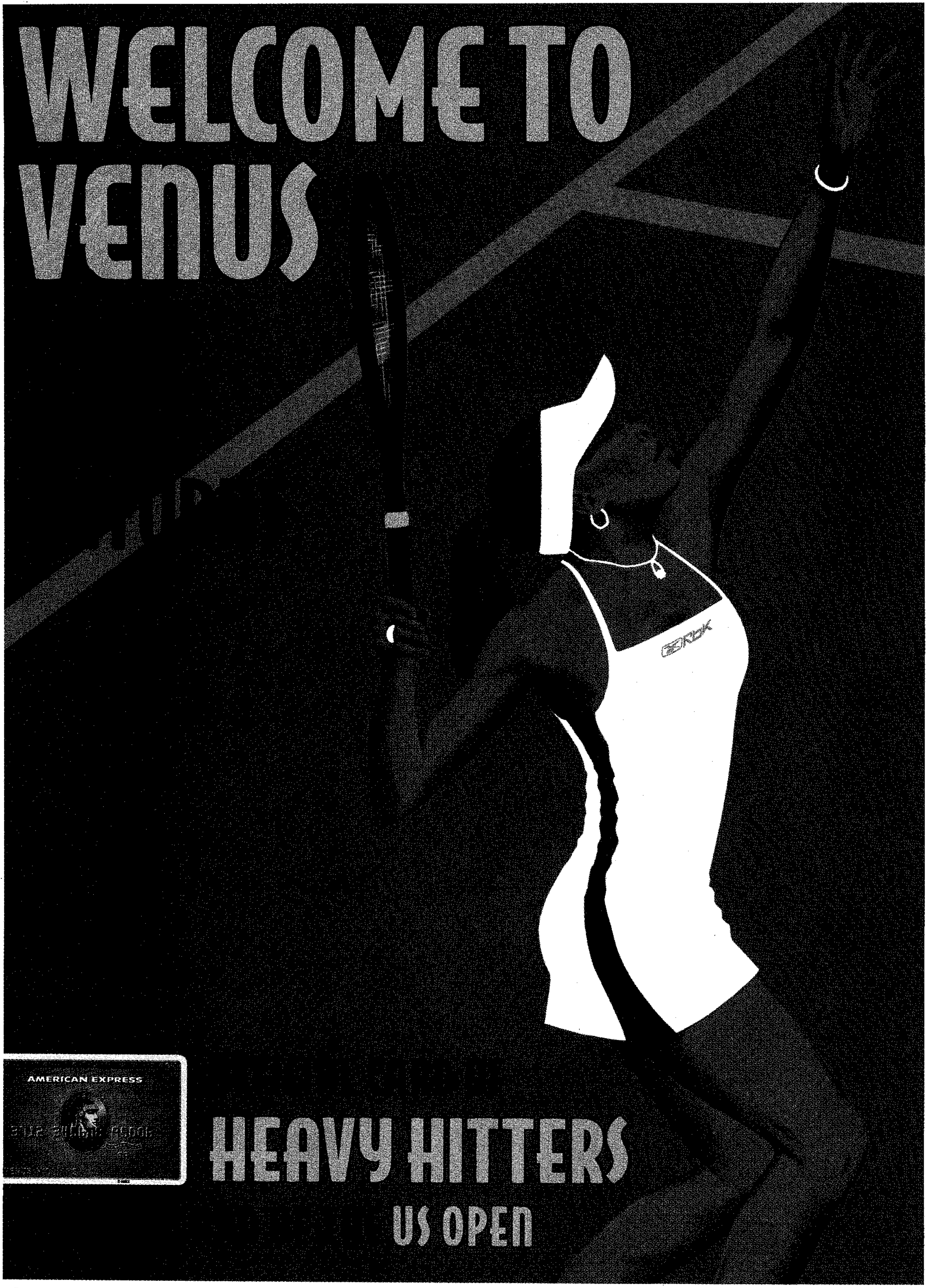
Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 11, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 66th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
Pioneer Theatre, 155 E. 3rd St. (212-254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182).
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A tribute to Jet Li. Aug. 20 at 7:30: "Hero" (2003, Zhang Yimou; in Mandarin). ♦ Aug. 24 at 7: "Fist of Legend" (1994, Gordon Chan; in English, Japanese, and Cantonese). ♦ A Mira Nair retrospective. Aug. 21 at 2: "India Cabaret" (1985) and "The Laughing Club of India" (2000). ♦ Aug. 21 at 4: "Salaam Bombay!" (1988; in Hindi and English). ♦ Aug. 22 at 2: "Mississippi Masala" (1991). ♦ Aug. 22 at 4:15: "The Perez Family" (1995). ♦ Repertory nights. Aug. 21-22 at 6:30: "A Streetcar Named Desire" (1951, Elia Kazan).
ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—Aug. 18-19 at 8: "The Mammals of Victoria" (1994, Stan Brakhage) and "The God of Day Had Gone Down Upon Him" (2000, Brakhage). ♦ Films presented by *The Onion*. Aug. 19 at 7 and 9:30: "The Yes Men" (2003, Dan Ollman, Sarah Price, and Chris Smith). ♦ Selected works from Newsreel, a radical filmmaking collective. Aug. 20 at 7:30, Aug. 21 at 9, and Aug. 22 at 5: "Yippies" (1968) and "Summer '68" (1969). ♦ Aug. 20 at 9:30 and Aug. 21-22 at 7: "Resist—with Noam Chomsky" (1968) and "Hanoi, Tuesday the 13th" (1967, Santiago Alvarez). ♦ Aug. 21 at 5 and Aug. 22 at 9: "People's War" (1969) and "Only the Beginning" (1971). ♦ Starting Aug. 20: Folk Film Festival. Aug. 20 at 7: "The Holy Modal Rounders in: Bound to Lose" (2004, Sam Douglas et al.). ♦ Aug. 21 at 2: Selections from Alan Lomax's raw footage. ♦ Aug. 21 at 4: "Dreadful Memories: The Life of Sarah Ogan Gunning" (1988, Mimi Pickering) and "Hazel Dickens: It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song" (2002, Pickering). ♦ Aug. 21 at 6: "Ballads, Blues, Bluegrass 1961" (1961, Lomax and George Pickow) and "Oss Oss Wee Oss" (1961, Peter Kennedy, Pickow, and Lomax). ♦ Aug. 22 at 2: "50 Miles from Times Square" (1981, John Cohen) and "Post-Industrial Fiddle" (1982, Cohen). ♦ Aug. 22 at 4: "Whoa, Mule" (1989, Herb E. Smith) and "Ralph Stanley's Story" (2000, Smith). ♦ Aug. 22 at 6: "The Land Where Blues Began" (1978/1991, Lomax) and "Billy in the Lowgrounds: Old Time Music from the Newport Folk Festival, 1966" (1966, Lomax). ♦ Aug. 23 at 7: "The Ballad and the Source" (1983, Cohen). ♦ Aug. 23 at 9: "Wild World of Hasil Adkins" (1993, Julien Nitzberg). ♦ Aug. 24 at 7: "Mountain Music of Peru" (1984, Cohen). ♦ Aug. 24 at 9: "Devil Got My Woman" (1966, Lomax) and "Delta Blues/Cajun Two-Step" (1966, Lomax).
BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Aug. 18 at 4:30, 6:45, and 9: "The Photographer" (2002, Sebastián Alarcón; in Spanish). ♦ A Yasujiro Ozu retrospective. All films are in Japanese. Aug. 19 at 6 and 9: "Late Autumn" (1960). ♦ Aug. 24 at 4:30, 6:45, and 9: "An Autumn Afternoon" (1962). ♦ Aug. 20-22: The New York Korean Film Festival. All films are in Korean. Aug. 20 at 6:45: "Sky Blue" (2003, Kim Moon-Saeng). ♦ Aug. 20 at 9: "H" (2002, Lee Jong-Hyuk). ♦ Aug. 21 at 4: "Singles" (2003, Kwon Chil-In). ♦ Aug. 21 at 6:45: "The Classic" (2002, Kwak Jae-Yong). ♦ Aug. 21 at 9:30: "Once Upon a Time in a Battlefield" (2003, Lee Joon-Ik). ♦ Aug. 22 at 4: "If You Were Me" (2003, Soon-Rye Im et al.). ♦ Aug. 22 at 6:45: "A Good Lawyer's Wife" (2003, Im Sang-Soo). ♦ Aug. 22 at 9: "Wild Card" (2003, Kim Yoo-Jin). ♦ R. W. Fassbinder films. Aug. 23 at 4:30, 6:45, and 9: "Chinese Roulette" (1976; in German).
BRYANT PARK
Sixth Ave. at 42nd St.—Mondays, starting at dusk: Free drive-in-style moviegoing. Aug. 23: "The Big Sleep" (1946, Howard Hawks).
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Aug. 18-24 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "The Leopard" (†).
SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—Midnight movies. Aug. 20-21: "Roger and Me" (1989, Michael Moore).
THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Through Aug. 28: "Five-Star Films: Fifty Years of Audience Favorites." Aug. 21 at 6: "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis" (†). ♦ Aug. 21 at 7:45: "Europa, Europa" (†).
WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Aug. 29: "Dark Streets and Vast Horizons: The American Vision of Anthony Mann." Aug. 18 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "He Walked by Night" (1948). ♦ Aug. 18 at 2:45 and 6:15: "Side Street" (1949). ♦ Aug. 19 at 2:15 and 6:30: "The Furies" (1950). ♦ Aug. 19 at 4:30 and 8:45 and Aug. 20 at 5: "Devil's Doorway" (1950). ♦ Aug. 20 at 1:30 and Aug. 21 at 7: "El Cid" (1961). ♦ Aug. 20 at 7: "The Fall of the Roman Empire" (†). ♦ Aug. 21 at 2:30, Aug. 22 at 8, and Aug. 23 at 1: "The Glenn Miller Story" (1954). ♦ Aug. 21 at 5 and Aug. 24 at 3 and 9: "T-Men" (1947). ♦ Aug. 22 at 2 and 6 and Aug. 24 at 1 and 5: "Raw Deal" (1948). ♦ Aug. 22 at 4, Aug. 23 at 3:30, and Aug. 24 at 7: "Reign of Terror" (1949).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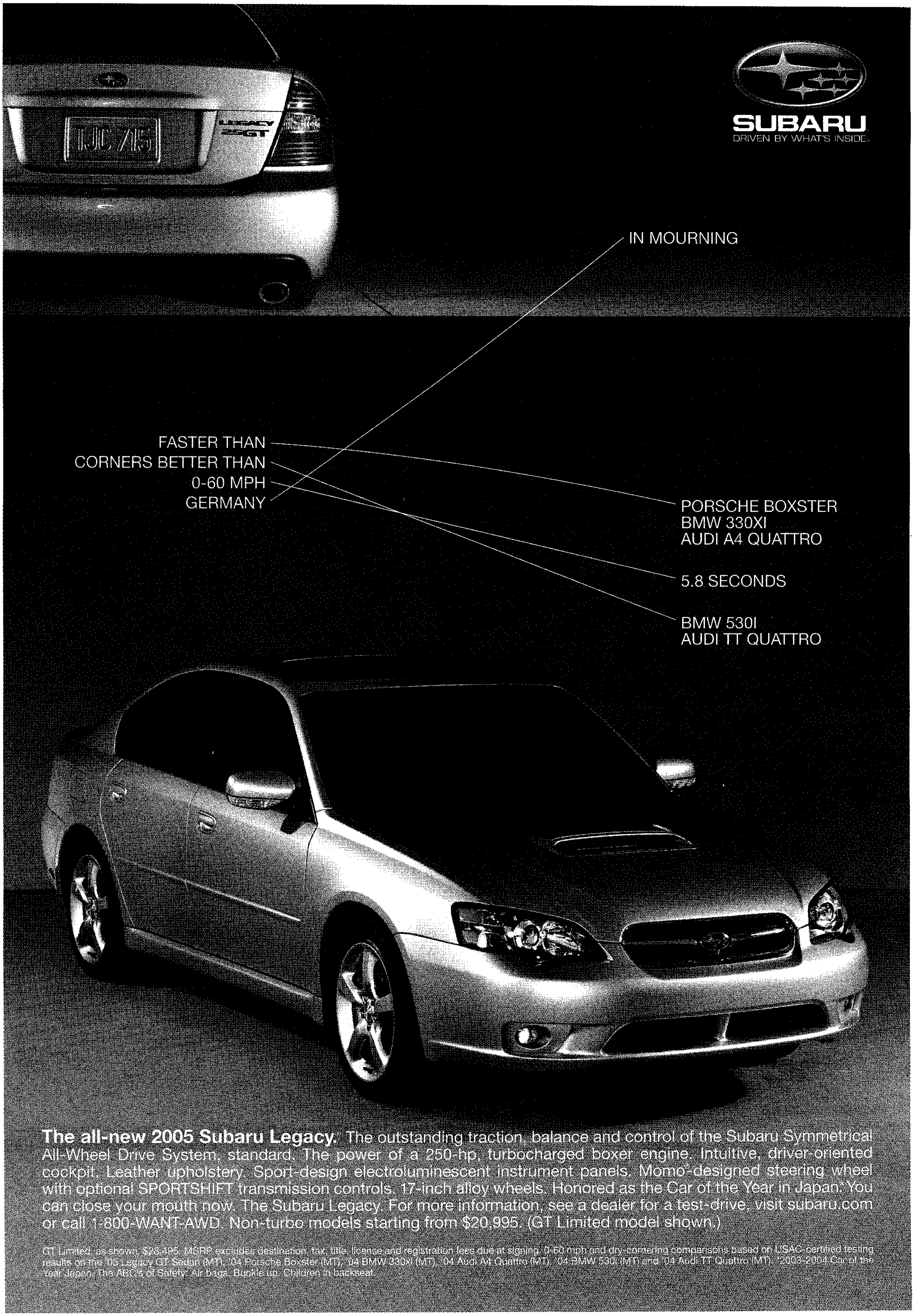
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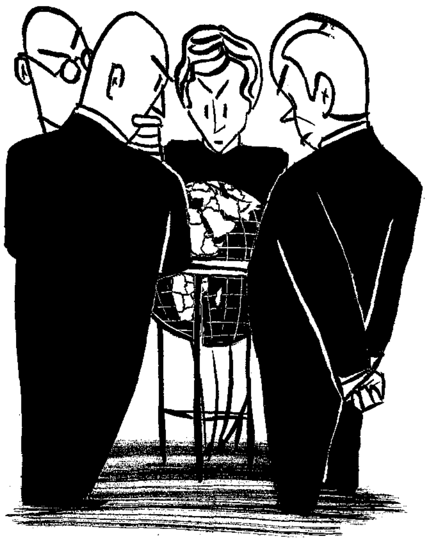
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
DANGERS PRESENT

With a trumpet blare of martial rhetoric, the Committee on the Present Danger has reconstituted itself again. The original Committee, founded in 1950, was made up of Cold Warriors who felt that the country was insufficiently alert to the dangers of Soviet Communism. The second version, founded in 1976, had the same purpose, but in retrospect it was most important as an early gathering of the foreign-policy wing of the intellectual movement that was becoming known as neoconservatism. The new Committee is also neoconservative, but its present danger is a different one. It is aimed, as its chief political sponsors, Senators Joseph Lieberman, of Connecticut, and Jon Kyl, of Arizona, put it in an op-ed piece in the Washington *Post*, at "international terrorism from Islamic extremists and the outlaw states that either harbor or support them." The Senators went on to declare that "the world war against Islamic terrorism is the test of our time."

The new Committee got off to a bumpy start when, on its second day of business, its managing director, the old Reagan hand Peter Hannaford, resigned after Laura Rozen's blog, "War and Piece," reported that he had been a paid Washington lobbyist for the Nazi-friendly Austrian Freedom Party. (Other former public officeholders on the Committee include Newt Gingrich, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and James Woolsey.) Nevertheless, the mere fact of the new Committee's existence draws attention to a question that, under the strange bylaws of Presidential campaigns, will not be discussed between now and November, at which point it will abruptly become the most important question in the world: What happens next in the American war on terror? The formation of the new Committee, which shares a number of members with its predecessor, can be taken as a sign that the wider hawk community, which has dominated the foreign-policy debates of the past three years, isn't about to disband. If George W. Bush loses, the hawks will be pre-positioned to offer vigorous opposition to a Kerry Administration. If Bush wins, they will rightly perceive the first few months after the election as a crucial opportunity to push, hard, for a post-Iraq series of foreign-policy moves. Bush has already publicly called, in effect, for regime change in Iran (the hawks' new No. 1 target) and in the Palestinian Authority. Installed for a second time, he will surely give the hawks and their agenda a full hearing.



The first Committee on the Present Danger is so far back in time that nobody remembers it accurately, which is too bad, because it has a resonant and instructive history. Its chairman was James B. Conant, then the president of Harvard. Conant unquestionably wanted to alert the country as joltingly as possible to the Soviet threat. He was also trying to take anti-Communism out of the exclusive control of people like Senator Joseph McCarthy, who had begun his rampage a few months earlier. But the institutional life of the original Committee on the Present Danger turned on another issue entirely: Conant's crusade for two years of required military service for all eighteen-year-old American males, with no exceptions.

Conant dreamed of an enormous standing Army of three to four million, stationed mainly in Germany, and he called for large tax increases to pay for it. The American troops would keep the Soviets' westward expansionist impulses in check and decrease the importance of the nuclear option in American strategy, and universal service would knit the country together as it went through its grand struggle. Conant did not lose many battles in his long career as an eminent

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

establishmentarian, but he lost this one: President Truman and the Pentagon, initially supporters of universal service, backed down at the crucial moment; the military draft that Congress created was nowhere near universal and had many exemptions; and the Committee on the Present Danger faded away.

The United States hasn't had a full-dress national debate over who should serve in the military in the half century since, but the issue keeps resurfacing in unexpected ways. The reason John Kerry seems French to some people is that his father went to work for Conant in 1954, when the spirit of the Committee on the Present Danger was still strong enough to propel him to the post of the American high commissioner in Germany, and the ten-year-old future Democratic Presidential candidate's parents packed him off to a Swiss boarding school, away from the front lines of the Cold War in West Berlin. Conant's defeat in the battle over military service meant that by the time of the Vietnam War it was easy for well-connected people to avoid combat in the world struggle with Communism, which is why Kerry's service was so unusual, and why President Bush, like most politicians of his and Kerry's generation, was able to avoid it. In the packaging of both Presidential candidates—the unceasing references to Kerry's combat duty in Vietnam, and Bush's stagy, relentless emphasizing of his role as Commander-in-Chief—the absence of an all-inclusive draft is ever-present in the background. But it's Kerry, who chose to fight, not Bush, who chose not to, who embodies the spirit of service of the original Committee, and it can't be just coincidence that he has a personal connection to its chairman.

The ground force of the United States military is now tied up (in fact, overextended), mostly in Iraq. Nobody else seems to be willing to send forces to relieve the American soldiers. So, when the war on terror enters its next phase, who is going to fight it, and where is the money going to come from? The original Committee on the Present Danger candidly answered those questions about the Cold War, in the name of keeping the country unified in a time of crisis. Present-day American hawks, before the invasion of Iraq, chose instead to present the sacrifices of war as minimal: no conscription, no taxation, and (prospectively) very little price to be paid, even by Iraqis. That made the war an easier sell than it should have been and the postwar period more contentious than it had to be, not just in Iraq but also at home, where the mood is angry and mistrustful and military families in particular are feeling ill-used. So far, the new Committee on the Present Danger has said only that it doesn't want the United States to retreat. It really ought to emulate its original predecessor by forthrightly stating the costs—human, financial, and diplomatic—of the aggressive actions it is going to be advocating, and to say who should bear them. If hawks continue to argue for a maximal foreign policy while implying that it will have a minimal price, and they win the argument, then the bitterness of today's political atmosphere will soon seem like a distant Elysium of national harmony.

—*Nicholas Lemann*

THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

DRY

As the Democrats just demonstrated in Boston and the Republicans are likely to show later this month in New York, mainstream political conventions don't offer much in the way of unscripted drama. For heated debate, backroom rainmaking, and eleventh-hour surprise, one must turn to the Prohibition Party, which has been fielding candidates for high office since 1872. After a poor showing in the 2000 general election (two hundred and eight votes), the Party split into two factions, each of which has already held a convention and nominated a ticket. As a result, this year two sets of Presidential hopefuls will be running on the same platform: Put down that drink.

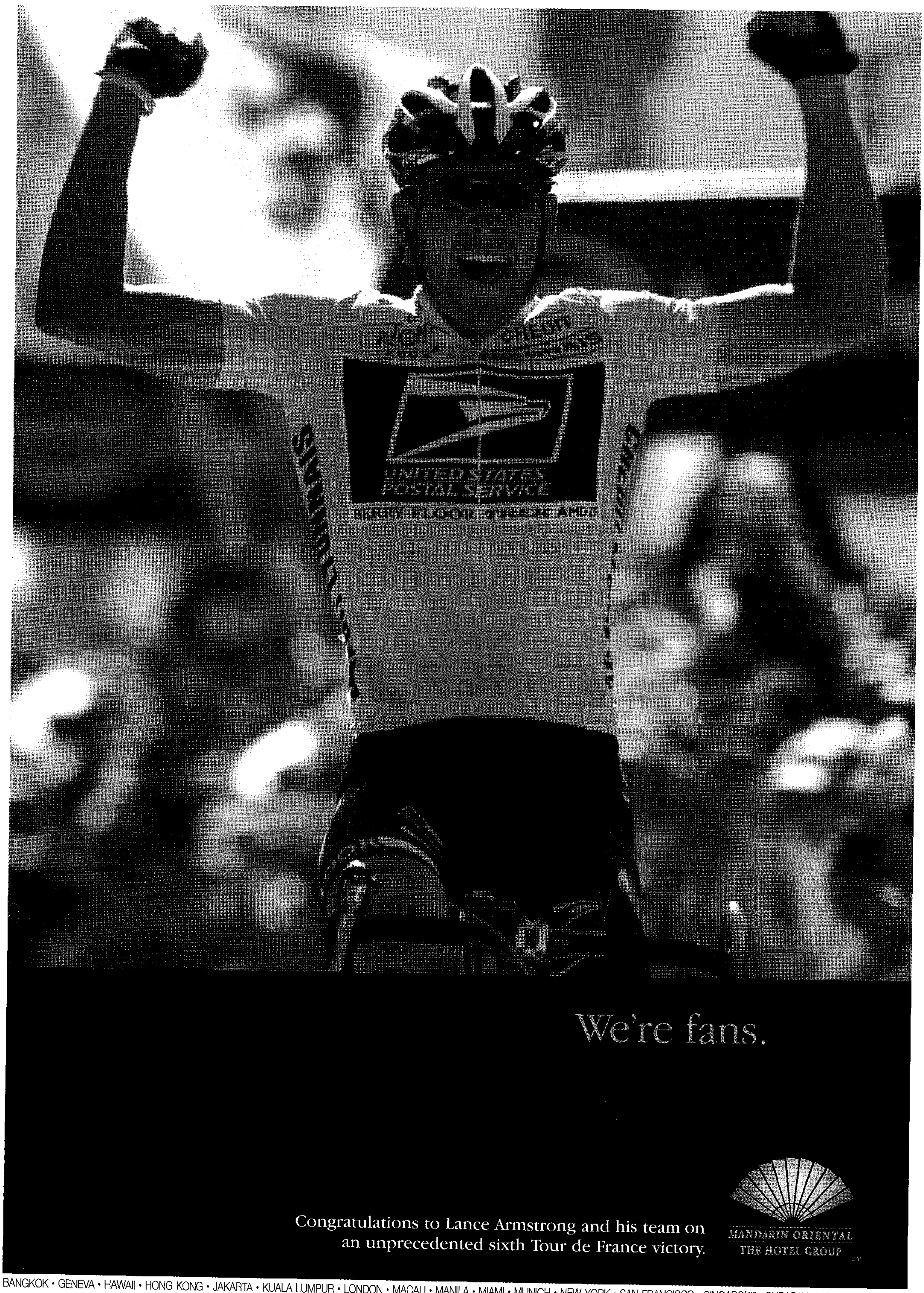
The Prohibition Party was founded in 1869, by the Reverend John Russell, a Michigan Methodist, in reaction to the Republicans' conservatism under Ulysses S. Grant. At its height, it ran governors, college presidents, and Army generals in races for the White House, once winning 2.2 per cent of the vote, and it landed candidates in the Florida governor's mansion and in Congress. But by the early nineteen-twenties the Party's glory days had come and gone. "The Eighteenth Amendment sort of knocked it for a loop," Michael Kelly, a Party historian, said. "I guess Repeal didn't do it much good, either."

For the past twenty-five years, the Party has been led by Earl Dodge, a genial Baptist from Massachusetts, now seventy-one years old, whom even rivals call Mr. Prohibition. A onetime life-insurance and cemetery-plot salesman, Dodge found his passion for temperance in the early fifties. He has run, several times and in several states, as a Prohibition candidate for the House, the Senate, and the governorship. He has also run for Vice-President, and since 1984 he has been at the top of his Party's ticket. "My first act as President would be to remove the wine cellar that Mr. Eisenhower had installed in the White House," he said recently.

Dodge's critics say that, during his tenure, the Party has suffered a significant decline. It has lost ballot access in every state except Colorado and more than fifteen thousand votes in the bargain. In 1999, Dodge sold the condo in Denver that had been the Party's home for twenty-two years and announced that he was putting the proceeds into the Party's nonprofit foundation and building a wing on his house in a Denver suburb to serve as Prohibition headquarters. But reports started to circulate that the only noticeable addition to Dodge's property was a toolshed, and a growing number of dissidents called for him to give a financial accounting. One of them was Jim Hedges, a retired Marine Corps tuba player, who, as tax assessor of a small township in Pennsylvania, is the only Prohibition candidate to have gained elective office in the past forty-five years. "The trustees of that foundation include Dodge himself, one of his daughters, and a once influential Party member who had become senile," Hedges says.

Don Webb, who chairs the Party's dissident faction and also teaches mortuary science in Mississippi, criticizes Dodge for hanging on to historical Prohibition Party documents instead of donating them to the Smithsonian. "Americans need to appreciate this piece of their heritage," he said. "But that can't happen if the materials are, as we understand it, packaged up and covered under tarpaulin in the carport of Mr. Dodge's residence."

Dodge ascribes the charges to bitter-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ness; his critics tried to oust him in 1999. And he insists that he has added a room to his house, where his wife tends to the Dodge Family Association (they have seven children and nineteen grandchildren) while, down the hall, he runs the Party and a business selling political buttons over the Internet. In any case, last summer Dodge led the Party's national convention, to which the dissidents were not invited. The nine people who attended, among them two of Dodge's daughters, nominated him to run for President.

In September, the splinter group held its own convention, at a member's timeshare in Tennessee. For its Presidential candidate, it eventually settled on Gene Amondson, a minister and amateur landscape painter, who had been touring churches across the country and reënacting a fiery anti-alcohol sermon made famous by the early-twentieth-century ballplayer turned evangelist Billy Sunday. Amondson's running mate, Leroy Pletten, is a former civilian Army employee from Michigan, who was fired, in 1980, after he blew the whistle on lax enforcement of smoking regulations in his office.

Several Party dissidents say that the rift could be healed if Dodge would relinquish some control to a new generation. Dodge himself would like to find a successor, but in the meantime, should anything happen to him, there is always his running mate, an attorney from Texas named Howard Lydick. Dodge is not bothered that Lydick underwent heart-transplant surgery recently. "The new heart came from a teen-ager who had died in a car accident," Dodge said. "It not only saved Howard's life but he grew a full head of hair as a result."

—*Adam Green*

AT THE BARRICADES JITTERS

The Republican National Convention was still several weeks away when the folks at the New York Civil Liberties Union decided to set up shop in a defunct shoe store in order to prepare for all the marches, rallies, and inevitable arrests. The Protecting Protest Storefront, a few blocks north of Madison Square Garden, on Eighth Avenue, is the one with a big poster in the front window that reads, "We're not anti-police. We're anti-police brutality."

In the weeks since it opened, the storefront has become a repository for random civilian queries and grievances. A young woman named Ezili, who described herself as a singer-actress-writer-composer, stopped by one afternoon to ask advice about how and where she might perform a protest song she'd written. "I actually wrote it years ago, about Reagan," she said, "but I changed it for Bush." Then, beating out a rhythm on one of the folding tables, she sang a jazzy a-cappella version of "Song for George Bush: I'm Not Gonna Let You Bring Me Down":

> Men and women had to die
> 'Cos you told a whoppin' lie.
> Someday soon you will pay.
> I can hear God say,
> *I'm not gonna let you bring me down.*

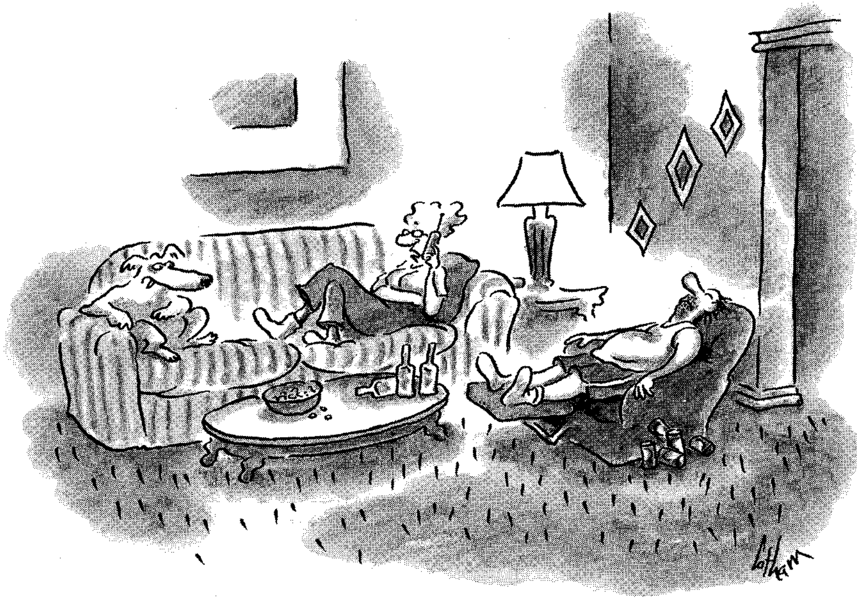
Ari Rosmarin, a nineteen-year-old Columbia junior who mans the front desk, gave Ezili the telephone number for one of the protest organizers. A little later, a fabric importer who works in the area popped in to say that he thought the civil libertarians were misguided. "After 9/11, this is not the time for protests," he said. "If you take a hundred cops to protect protesters from getting out of line, that's a hundred cops not doing what they should be doing, which is protecting *me*."

Rosmarin, a genial mop-top from Santa Monica, greets most of the walk-ins. "A construction worker came in and said he wanted a political sticker to put on his helmet," he said. "It turned out we didn't have anything except one that said, 'Marriage for Everybody.' " The hardhat politely declined. His buddies on the job, he said, "already give me enough trouble for wearing a Red Sox T-shirt." Someone else came in to report that he agreed with one of the signs in the window. It was the text of the First Amendment.

One evening last week, about a dozen volunteers—including three lawyers, a couple of law students, an actor, and a woman who referred to herself as "a retired grandmother"—sat down in folding chairs at the storefront for a training session run by Steve Theberge, a twenty-three-year-old community organizer for the N.Y.C.L.U. Theberge has a nose ring, and a tattoo on his arm that says "Liberation." "We want you to be monitors," he told the group, radiating the cheery demeanor of a kindergarten teacher. "We think the best way to keep everyone safe is to make sure everyone knows we're watching."

The volunteers' tools will be cameras, not bullhorns. Rather than making speeches or directing mobs of marchers, they have signed on to keep an eye on the police and document any abuses.

At the training session, the lawyers seemed to be the most jittery. "I saw what they did in Boston, putting all the protesters in those horrible pens," one woman in a business suit said. "I can't believe what's happening to free speech in this country!" Another lawyer, a graying man in a nice



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dress shirt, seconded her concern. "I'm an accomplished street photographer," he said. "I can take thousands of pictures of the cops, show what they're doing. That's why I'm here. That's what *I* want to do."

Theberge smiled benignly. "Nobody is expecting this to be a rough time," he said. "But we just want to be there if something goes down."

Theberge rattled off a list of protesting do's and don'ts for the volunteers to pass on. "You've got to tell people they can't carry any banners on wooden or metal poles," he said. "The cops won't allow it. It's got to be cardboard tubing." He went on, "And people have got to know that there is a possibility that their bags are going to be searched, so you shouldn't have anything in there that you wouldn't want the cops to see." He paused, then added, "I'm trying to put that the most delicate way I can."

"We can give advice to protesters, but we're not representing people if they get arrested," he went on. "Volunteers from the National Lawyers Guild will be doing that. You'll be able to tell who they are, because they'll have on bright-green hats."

"Do we get hats?" someone asked.

"Yeah, blue hats, and white T-shirts," Theberge said. The silence that followed conveyed disappointment.

"Sorry," Theberge said. "The guild definitely has the cooler hats."

—*Jeffrey Toobin*

HIGH AND TIGHT DEPT.
NEW JERSEY HAIRCUT

"You want a New Jersey haircut?" Vito Quattrocchi said the other day. "Move to Florida." He was referring not to the cut you might get in one of those sleek New York-style salons that are increasingly relocating to the suburbs but to the no-frills barbershop treatment that seems, like the independent bookstore or the Atlantic salmon, doomed to extinction. Quattrocchi was standing in front of the mirror at the Ames Barber Shop, in Rutherford, New Jersey, where he works and gripes. He has been cutting hair since he was sixteen, and, now that he's fifty-one, he likes to call himself a "dinosaur," even though, by his own estimate, he is the second-youngest barber in New Jersey. ("I know one younger guy, Ciro Alvino, up in Butler," Quattrocchi says. "He's forty-seven.")

In New Jersey, there is no such thing as a new barber, not since the passage of the Cosmetology and Hairstyling Act of 1984, which did away with the State Board of Barber Examiners and—in the spirit of Jon Bon Jovi, mall bangs, and rattails—made beauty care the only game in town. Don't be fooled by all the striped poles spinning outside storefronts in, say, Hoboken. "They might look like barbershops, but they're not," Quattrocchi said. "They're beauty parlors." For some twenty years, Quattrocchi had his own barbershop, Vito's, in Hoboken, where there were dozens of competing shops; now there are only two or three. Many of the Old Guard, nearing retirement age and facing profit squeezes in the metrosexual era, have moved to Florida, where they can transfer their barber's licenses. "Within the next ten years, you're not going to see barbers at all," Quattrocchi said.

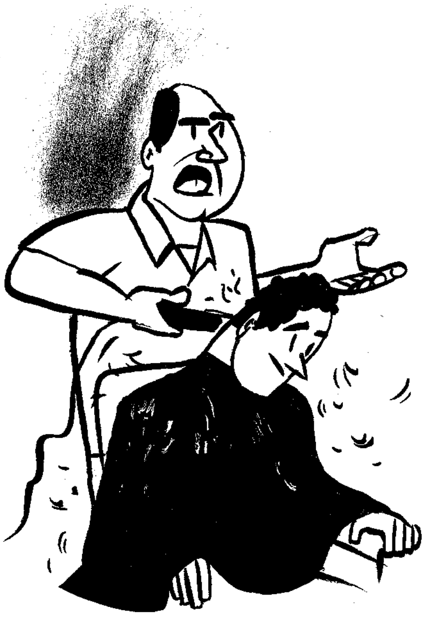
Whether the ascendance of hairdressing was the result of lobbying by beauty colleges, as Quattrocchi contends, or bureaucratic streamlining (the official explanation), state law now requires aspiring scissorsmiths to demonstrate high-school equivalency and complete twelve hundred hours of accredited (and often expensive) cosmetics training. These are not prerequisites that favor the immigrant base from which barbers have historically come. Previously, an aspirant worked two years as an apprentice to a licensed barber, and two more as a journeyman, after which he became a master—a licensed barber.

Judging from the sample pictures on the wall at the Ames Barber Shop, the Jersey cut is a very short one. "Now everything is a fade," Quattrocchi said, pointing at a poster full of assorted buzz cuts. "There's a Spanish fade—that's almost bald. Guido fade. White-boy fade. Rican fade. China boy—that's where you got a big flip on top." He then rattled off a list of some of the older standards, which occasionally come in handy: Caesar, Yuppie Cut ("a crewcut, faded down and popped up"), High and Tight, the Commando. Just an hour earlier, he had sent a man off with a mullet. "And the other day," he continued, "a guy came in asking for a cut from the fifties: a flattop, long on the sides, coming into a D.A.—a duck's ass—in the back. I said, 'You mean you want a Detroit?' Of course, in New Jersey they used to call it a flattop with fenders."

A curly-haired man with a goatee entered the shop and sat down. "Short on the sides and long on the top," he said.

Quattrocchi tugged at the man's thinning patch of curls and then patted the sides down. "You want a Kramer kind of thing?" he asked.

The customer furrowed his brow and tilted his head to one side. "Yeah," he replied, "like a Kramer, I guess." He said that his main concern was his bald spot. "I've tried everything," he went on. "Rogaine, even massages."



"You use anything for those massages?" Quattrocchi asked. "Try witch hazel. It'll stimulate growth."

Quattrocchi turned on his electric razor and began singing the lyrics to "Never on Sunday" as he shaved around the man's ears.

"Oh, I love that movie," the man said.

"It's a shame," Quattrocchi said. "A guy would rather go to a barbershop and sit in a chair like this."

After the customer left (thirteen bucks, plus two-dollar tip), looking much the same as he had when he entered, Quattrocchi turned to face the mirror once more. "I'm looking to get out of the business," he said. "As a matter of fact, on Thursday I'm interviewing for a teaching job at a beauty school—Parisian Beauty Academy, in Hackensack. You'll notice I used no scissors, hardly, on that guy." He made a buzzing sound. "The girls don't know how to do that."

—*Ben McGrath*

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THE NEW YORKER FESTIVAL

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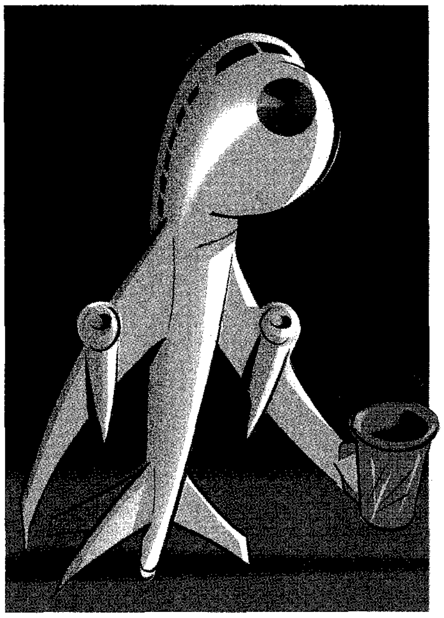
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
AUTOPILOT

Capitalism is supposed to be revolutionary: demolish the old and usher in the new, without regard for tradition or custom. The free market, as Marx and Engels wrote, is a place of "everlasting uncertainty and agitation," where "all fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away." But, even in America, fast frozen relations have proved to be very tenacious. Bad practices linger, even when the consequences are dire. Companies, like people, don't much like to change.

Of all the stubborn companies, the airlines may be the most mulish of all. In the past three years, the major carriers have lost more than twenty billion dollars, and a huge portion of their business has gone to low-cost competitors like Southwest and JetBlue. With too many expensive planes flying too many places at too high a cost, some airlines lose money every time they fly. US Airways and United went bankrupt in 2002. American nearly did in 2003. And now Delta, which burned through three-quarters of a billion dollars in cash in the first half of this year, seems headed for insolvency, too. It's not exactly news that running an airline is a lousy way to make a buck. People in the industry have known it for years. What's startling is that only now, with the business in shambles, are they doing anything about it.

When the airlines came of age, in the sixties and seventies, the industry was regulated. The government controlled prices and determined which routes the airlines could fly. There were few price wars and, in most cities, few carriers. Airline executives didn't have to think much about fending off competition, and employees were able to carve out a nice life for themselves. Because the carriers were concerned mainly with planes in the air, and could pass cost increases along to customers, they rarely took a hard line with the labor unions. So mechanics and pilots, in addition to being well paid, benefitted from a raft of complex work rules, which gave them a great deal of control over things like scheduling, job assignments, and outsourcing. United, for instance, had to put three people in the cockpit of every 737, even though the plane was designed to be flown by two people. And it had to have a fully qualified mechanic at the gate just to wave the plane away.

After deregulation, in 1978, this cozy arrangement became an affliction. Prices are lower now, and there is genuine competition. You can't reliably pass on cost increases to your customers. The only way to make money is to be more productive, to get more done with less work—hardly a radical concept. Still, the major carriers have had a remarkably difficult time adjusting to it. They are sometimes called "legacy carriers," because they were around before 1978. The label fits all too well; the legacy of regulation haunts their approach to business. They are still bound by the old dispensation, hobbled by pension obligations and work rules that were devised for another era. For example, on many routes it would be a lot cheaper for the airlines to have their affiliates, which fly smaller, regional jets, handle the flights. But union contracts often limit how many flights the affiliates can be given. Pilots are guaranteed a set number of paid hours a month, whether they fly them or not, and they manipulate scheduling rules to turn ten days of vacation time into a month. It's no wonder that, between 1987 and 2002, while revenues at the majors fell by twenty-five per cent, real labor costs dropped hardly at all.



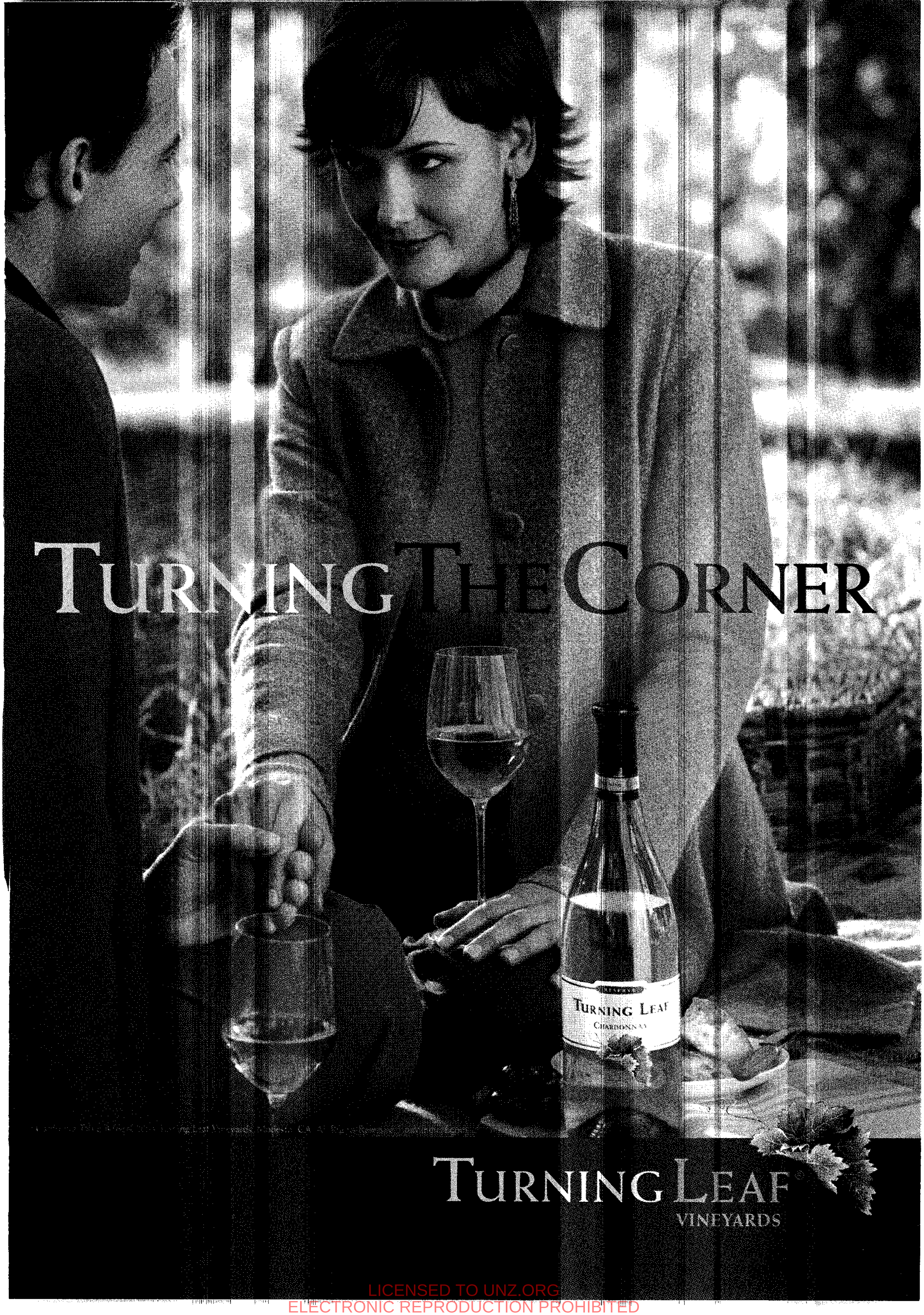
You can't pin this on the working man. Airline executives thought they could handle the higher costs because of their assumption, itself a legacy of regulation, that they'd be able to charge higher prices. The major carriers built their businesses on the idea that they'd offer better convenience and service than their low-cost rivals (like People's Express in the old days, Southwest today). They believed, as a recent Department of Transportation study said, that they could charge between ten and forty per cent more than low-cost carriers, "because they offer travelers features that low-fare carriers do not." But customers don't care as much about these features as the majors think. If flying into Long Beach instead of LAX and forgoing a meal can save you six hundred dollars, you won't much miss being able to choose between the chicken and the beef.

You might think that, for executives and employees alike, the threat of collapse would have concentrated the mind wonderfully. Both, surely, would prefer to work for a profitable airline than for a nonexistent one. But the mind is often distracted by the power of past experience—what the social scientists Simon Gächter and Arno Riedl call entitlement. In a series of experiments on bargaining, Gächter and Riedl have shown that, for people in a negotiation, ideas of fairness are determined by what happened in the past. Once someone earns a particular cut, all the participants, on both sides of the bargaining table, assume that that person is entitled to a similar cut again, even if conditions have completely changed.

The airline executives seem to think that they are entitled not only to business as usual but to the hefty salaries that come with conducting it. They also, apparently, feel entitled to multibillion-dollar government bailouts. The employees, for their part, grew accustomed to their entitlements, too. As a head of American's Transport Workers Union put it last year, "We have come to expect that, in good times or bad, American will be there to pay the bills as they have been every year past, whether profitable or not." Such venerable prejudices and opinions are finally being swept away. Cue everlasting uncertainty and agitation.

—*James Surowiecki*

ERIC PALMA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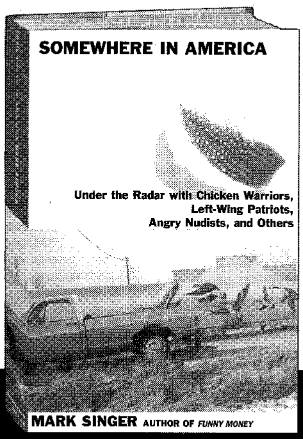
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CAMPAIGN JOURNAL

SWINGTIME

Former Bush voters advertise their disaffection.

BY PHILIP GOUREVITCH

Errol Morris, whose inventive and stylized documentaries include "The Thin Blue Line," "Mr. Death," and an Oscar-winning portrait of Robert McNamara, "The Fog of War," is also a prodigious director of TV commercials—the ultimate message movies. It's a lucrative sideline in which he takes considerable pleasure. He's made successful advertisements for such brands as Miller High Life, Adidas, and Volkswagen, although some of his favorite spots—one for Quaker Oats, for example, which shows an orangutan spooning porridge into his mouth, then setting aside the utensil and blissfully plunging his face into the breakfast bowl—have never been broadcast. A few years ago, Morris directed Apple's enormously popular "Switch" campaign, which consisted of vignettes about real people who had abandoned PCs for Macs. And, while he has never before been involved in electoral politics, this year Morris decided to make a series of documentary political ads featuring Republican switchers, people who voted for George W. Bush in 2000 and will vote for John Kerry this time around.

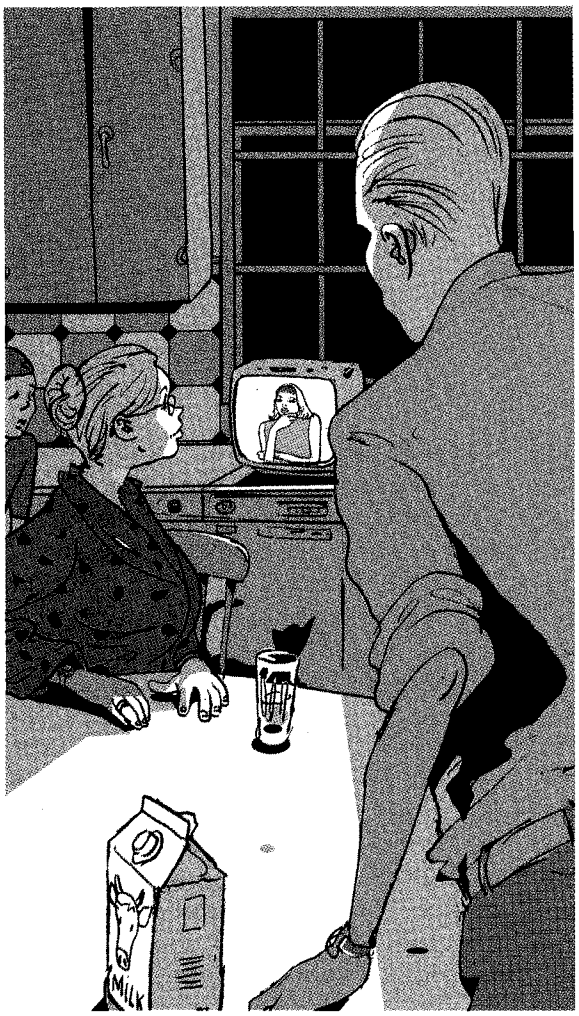
Morris, who lives in the echt-liberal enclave of Cambridge, Massachusetts, didn't actually know any such people, but, he told me, "the pollsters said they're out there—in America—and I'm really interested in what they have to say." After all, the outcome of the election is expected to hinge largely on swing voters, and, Morris said, "these ads are a way of talking to them. It isn't pollsters talking through actors. It isn't longtime Democrats talking to themselves. It isn't longtime Democrats hectoring Republicans. It's thoughtful Republicans—many of whom have decided to remain Republican—saying it's not us who are abandoning Bush; he's abandoned us, abandoned the Republican Party we've supported all these years. That is a very powerful message."

Morris knew exactly how he wanted the ads to look. He would shoot them on the Interrotron, a contraption of his invention, which uses two-way mirrors to project his face across the lens of the camera as he interviews people, so that his subjects address him eye to eye, and appear on film with maximal directness. There would be no props, no music, just the unscripted "eloquence of ordinary citizens" against a sheer and shadowless white backdrop: "Americans speaking to other Americans in their own words, expressing their beliefs and their hopes for the future," in an election "that will define how America is perceived around the world and, just as important, what America is for all of us." That was the pitch. Morris wanted to make the ads for the Kerry campaign, and he imagined interviewing the candidate on the Interrotron. "I thought that I could humanize him," he said. "To solve the problem of Bush being seen as a man of the people and Kerry as an aristocrat, I'd film Kerry exactly the way all the other people were filmed. I'd put him in the mix, and, by being one with all the rest, he would become a man of the people, speaking out with other Americans."

Ever since television advertising first figured in a Presidential election, in 1952, images of ordinary voters—frequently portrayed by actors—have been deployed to bolster politicians' cases in a variety of ways. In 1976, Gerald Ford attacked Jimmy Carter with a series of "person in the street" commercials, in which people from Georgia, shot in a cinéma-vérité style, explained that they'd like to vote for their governor, but Carter wasn't fit to be President. Other voters, from elsewhere in the country, spoke fondly of Ford, testifying to his appeal. Although Ford lost the election, the ads are credited with boosting his ratings in the final months of the race. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, the director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania and the author of "Packaging the Presidency," counts the Ford ads as the most influential "real people" ads in a Presidential contest. But, Jamieson told me, the most arresting work in the genre was produced in 1964, when the Lyndon Johnson campaign ran an ad called "Confessions of a Republican."

"It was done with an actor, and it was scripted, but you were not supposed to know that," Jamieson said. "He was in a studio, he was sitting on a chair, and he was smoking—which, of course, he wouldn't be doing anymore—and he was talking about how he's been a Republican all his life. It's a stream-of-consciousness narrative, almost Joycean. He's a Republican, but the Republican candidate, Barry Goldwater, doesn't stand for what he supports, and he thinks about the Convention, and how the people at the Convention weren't people like him, and he worries about Goldwater's statements about tactical nuclear weapons and, you know, what kind of person would say that, what kind of person would he be as President." At one point in the ad, the man remarks about Goldwater, "I read now where he says, 'A craven fear of death is sweeping across America.' What is that supposed to mean? If that means people don't want to fight a nuclear war, he's right. I don't."

The ad went on for more than four minutes, an astonishing length to contemplate, now that the typical spot is thirty seconds. "Four minutes!" Jamieson said. "And it was riveting, very artfully done, a very effective ad." Johnson defeated Goldwater in a landslide. "This was a big part of the strategy," she explained. "To convince Republicans that Goldwater was not their kind of Republican and that they could vote for Johnson. The actor, in those four minutes, just walked you through the conversion process. You tapped into his state of mind." ("Confessions of a Republican" is among more than two hundred and fifty Presidential-campaign commercials that can be seen online at the American Museum of the Moving Image's remarkable exhibition "The Living Room Candidate.")



MoveOn's new ads are aimed at heartland Republicans.

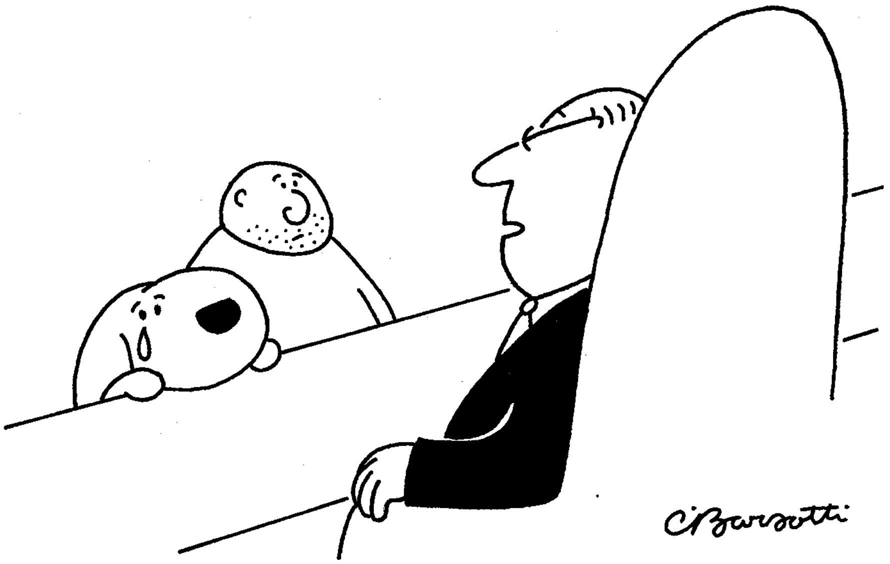
ISTVAN BANYAI

This year, the Kerry campaign has been appealing to centrist swing voters, much as Johnson did, with a moderate message of strength and optimism while depicting Bush as an extremist renegade, out of step with the mainstream conservatism of the Republican base. The ads that Morris proposed making for Kerry conformed to this approach, and the campaign expressed serious interest. But in a close race candidates tend to be especially cautious and conventional. "If you're doing an ad for Quaker Oats or Tylenol or whatever, there's a set of boundaries that you work within, but you're not really worried about offending anyone," Eric Korsh, one of Morris's producers, told me. "With political ads, as soon as you construct anything, it seems like everyone's first thought is Oh, my God, that's going to piss off *x* number of people. You get worried about what politicians worry about, which is inhibiting."

Kerry's most urgent advertising objective is to establish his Presidential credentials in a time of political anxiety and war, and he has run a predominantly positive, self-promoting television campaign, leaving the attack ads to independent political groups. These organizations are called 527s, after Section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code, which allows them to retain nonprofit status while running partisan ads, as long as they are not in any way coördinated with the parties or candidates they support. After months of fruitless discussions with the Kerry campaign about his ads, Morris concluded that the campaign's "maybe later" meant never, and he took the idea to Wes Boyd, the co-founder of the most successful and innovative of the 527s, MoveOn.

Advertising by independent activist groups has influenced elections in the past, most notably in 1988, when the right-wing National Security Political Action Committee produced the notorious Willie Horton ad, which helped the first President Bush destroy his opponent, Michael Dukakis. (A group called Swift Boat Veterans for Truth is now attempting to boost the younger Bush with an ad that seeks to discredit Kerry's combat service in Vietnam, and an outfit called People of Color United is running radio ads on black stations, denouncing Kerry as "rich, white, and wishy-washy.") But in the current election cycle Democrats have generally been the more aggressive exploiters of the 527 loophole, and also the leaders in harnessing the Internet as a political organizing, fund-raising, and mobilizing tool. MoveOn, which was started in 1998 by Boyd and his wife—former Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, who made their fortune with the Flying Toasters screen saver—has been uniquely successful in engaging its online constituency. Late last year, MoveOn sponsored an advertising competition, "Bush in Thirty Seconds," that drew thousands of entries. The winning spot, "Child's Play," which showed little kids toiling at menial jobs to pay off the Bush deficit, became famous when CBS refused to broadcast it during the Super Bowl.

MoveOn's participatory approach to politics makes for exceptionally speedy interaction between the organization



"O.K., O.K., house arrest."

and its activist base. Earlier this month, when Boyd wanted to establish a five-million-dollar program to organize volunteers to monitor the polls on Election Day in battleground states, he sent an e-mail to his list of two and a half million supporters, asking them to vote for the idea by pledging a million dollars. "Within twenty-four hours, $1.3 million came in," Boyd told me, and he said that this connection with the grass roots made him appreciate Morris's ad campaign. "For the longest time, we'd been looking for a way to do real-people ads, because we see ourselves as populists and as trying to amplify the voices of our members. I jumped on it immediately."

On July 1st, MoveOn sent out an e-mail and questionnaire seeking "authentic American voices committed to change" to take part in Morris's campaign. It didn't explicitly state that Morris was seeking Republican switchers, but the questionnaire was crafted to make converts from Bush to Kerry easily identifiable, and, of the twenty thousand responses MoveOn received, at least five hundred fit the criterion. Two weeks later, when shooting began, in a studio in the Boston suburb of Canton, that number had been winnowed to forty-one men and women from twenty-one states, who were brought before Morris and the Interrotron—ten a day—for interviews that lasted as long as an hour each.

During a break on the second day of filming, Morris stood with a paper cup of coffee in his hand, studying a board where still photographs of people he'd interviewed the day before were posted. He pointed to a woman named Kim Mecklenburg: "A financial adviser—she advises a lot of Republicans, and she said that she thought by doing this ad she might lose a sizable percentage of her clientele, and the moment that she had that thought she realized that she had to do it, because this is America and to think that way is absolutely out of the question in a democracy." He pointed to a man: "This guy made a hundred and eighty thousand dollars a year and now makes eight dollars an hour." There were two members of Diplomats and Military Commanders for Change. The first, William Harrop, a former Ambassador to Israel and Zaire, told Morris that he had spent his life trying to stay out of the news and avoid partisan politics, and that it was a measure of how profoundly he regretted his vote for Bush that he had set aside all his instincts and training to take part in a political ad. The second was George Moose, a former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. "He was talking about the photographs from Abu Ghraib, and I asked him, 'What do those photographs say to you?'" Morris told me. "He said, 'They say to me that we're just like everybody else,' and there's a moment where you just see this sorrow in his face."

Morris was summoned back to the Interrotron. He pointed rapidly at more photographs, ticking off professions: "Ex-marine, fund manager, medical transcriptionist, a professor at a business school who teaches M.B.A.s and talked about how ashamed he is by what an M.B.A. has produced in the White House." Morris stood back from the portrait board. "My Mt. Rushmore," he said.

Rhonda Nix—thirty-six, blond, and trim—spends her working days stained with ink, rebuilding laser printers and toner cartridges, in Shreveport, Louisiana. Her husband's parents, retired public schoolteachers, own and run the business she works for, which is thriving (Halliburton is one of their biggest customers), and when her father-in-law learned that she was taking time off to fly to Boston to be in a political ad sponsored by MoveOn, he phoned her up and told her that he didn't want to have anything more to do with her.

"Tell me about that," Morris prompted.

"He has this attitude—he's a Southern man," Nix said, and explained, "Where I'm from, there's two things. You're Southern Baptist and you're a Republican. You're closed-minded." Her father-in-law's view is that we've got a Christian President from Texas and we've got to keep it that way, and although Nix said, "That's not good enough for me," she didn't blame him, exactly. Like everyone else she knew, she had been a "huge Bush supporter" in the 2000 election, and the next year, on September 11th, she had felt, she said, that "he's going to take care of us. . . . He's going to take care of America." But she also found herself wondering, Why do people hate us so much?

September 11th made Nix painfully aware of her ignorance of politics. "I didn't know anything about democracy," she said. "I don't even think I knew how to spell it." She decided it was "the patriotic thing to do" to get informed about America and the larger world, and, as the Administration's hunt for Osama bin Laden gave way to war in Iraq, Nix felt hoodwinked: "They used our fear from 9/11, and they shifted our direction to Saddam Hussein, to Iraq, when all the time it wasn't them." After that, she said, "I changed completely. I realized I was a Democrat."

Nix was born and raised "dirt poor"—without indoor plumbing—in Mississippi, and she dropped out of school in the ninth grade to help her mother support her younger brother and sister. At twenty, she had a son of her own, and she was soon raising him as a single mother. Now, she said, she had a good job, and a husband who believed in her (unlike his parents, he didn't care about politics), and they had found a house in a "higher class" suburban neighborhood, where her son could attend a good high school. Last year, Nix was delighted to receive a check in the mail for the Child Tax Credit. "It was a great help to me," she said. But recently she learned that she had been eligible for it only because she earned more than twenty-six thousand dollars a year. People who earned less, as she had when she was a single mother and needed the money more desperately, did not qualify for the credit, and it outraged her that a quarter of a million children of military servicemen and women are excluded from this government kickback for the same reason. "And these people are fighting for us!" Nix exclaimed. In a democracy, with so many more poor people than rich people, she said, "that doesn't make any sense to me."

In January, Nix planted a John Kerry sign in her yard, and in early July she found it pulled up and "stabbed to death"—torn and battered, with the words "Burn in Hell" scrawled on it. She put it back up. "It has to stay there," she said, and went on, "When my friends and family realized that my priorities, that my values were shifting in a whole new direction, I found myself arguing a lot with them, almost like I was trying to change what they believe in and trying to give them reasons. But then I realized I couldn't change them. I can only change myself." She was particularly distressed that her arguments with professed Bush supporters often ended when she asked if they were registered to vote and was told no. Nix considered such passivity to be unpatriotic.

Nix spoke for nearly an hour, time enough for a motivated, well-prompted person to tell you a great deal about herself and her concerns. It's tougher to express a world view in thirty seconds, which is how long Morris's ads are—and the last four seconds don't count, since the law requires that they be devoted to a placard and voice-over identifying the ad's sponsor. A week after Morris finished filming his interviews, I went to see him at his studio in Cambridge, and there, on the monitor, was Rhonda Nix in twenty-six seconds: "We've got to take care of this country. It upsets me that you can go and spend billions and billions of dollars trying to liberate other people, when there's so many people here—they don't need liberation, but they need health care, they need food on their table, they need education. It is time to invest in this country. That's what I want to hear about, that we're being taken care of—here, at home. I'm still a Baptist, but I'm no longer a Republican."

"See—part of what I like is that this is not traditional political advertising," Morris said. "They're not involved in making a hard sell. The people potentially are likable."

Another ad appeared on the monitor, showing a burly man with a warm, open face: Rick Dove, a retired Marine Corps colonel from North Carolina. "When am I going to hear my President say, 'I blew it, folks, the buck stops here, this is my mistake, and I'm going to learn from this and we're going to go on'? I've never heard it. It's not that I'm looking for an apology. I want an admission when things are wrong that I'm responsible for that. I've been registered as a Republican for a long, long time, and I cannot see four more years of that kind of leadership."

Morris's French bulldog, Jackpot, waddled into the editing room, and Morris got down on the floor to play with him. "The problem is that there are just too many of them," Morris said. But he wasn't complaining. He wanted to cut multiple ads from the best interviews and get them all on the air. He wanted to produce a simultaneous print-ad campaign—a medium that Kathleen Hall Jamieson credits MoveOn with "revivifying"—and he liked the idea of billboard ads as well. "They should just blanket areas with all of them," he said of his ads. "They shouldn't just run one per person—they should run multiples per person, so you get to know the person and it becomes fresh each time, not just seeing the same thing recycled again and again and again."

A woman was on the monitor now,

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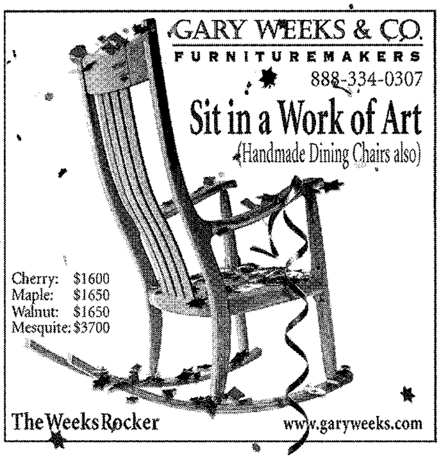
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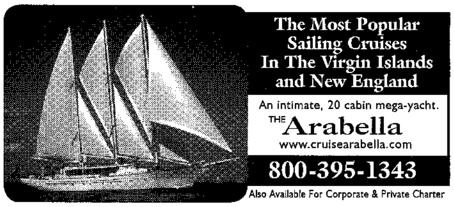
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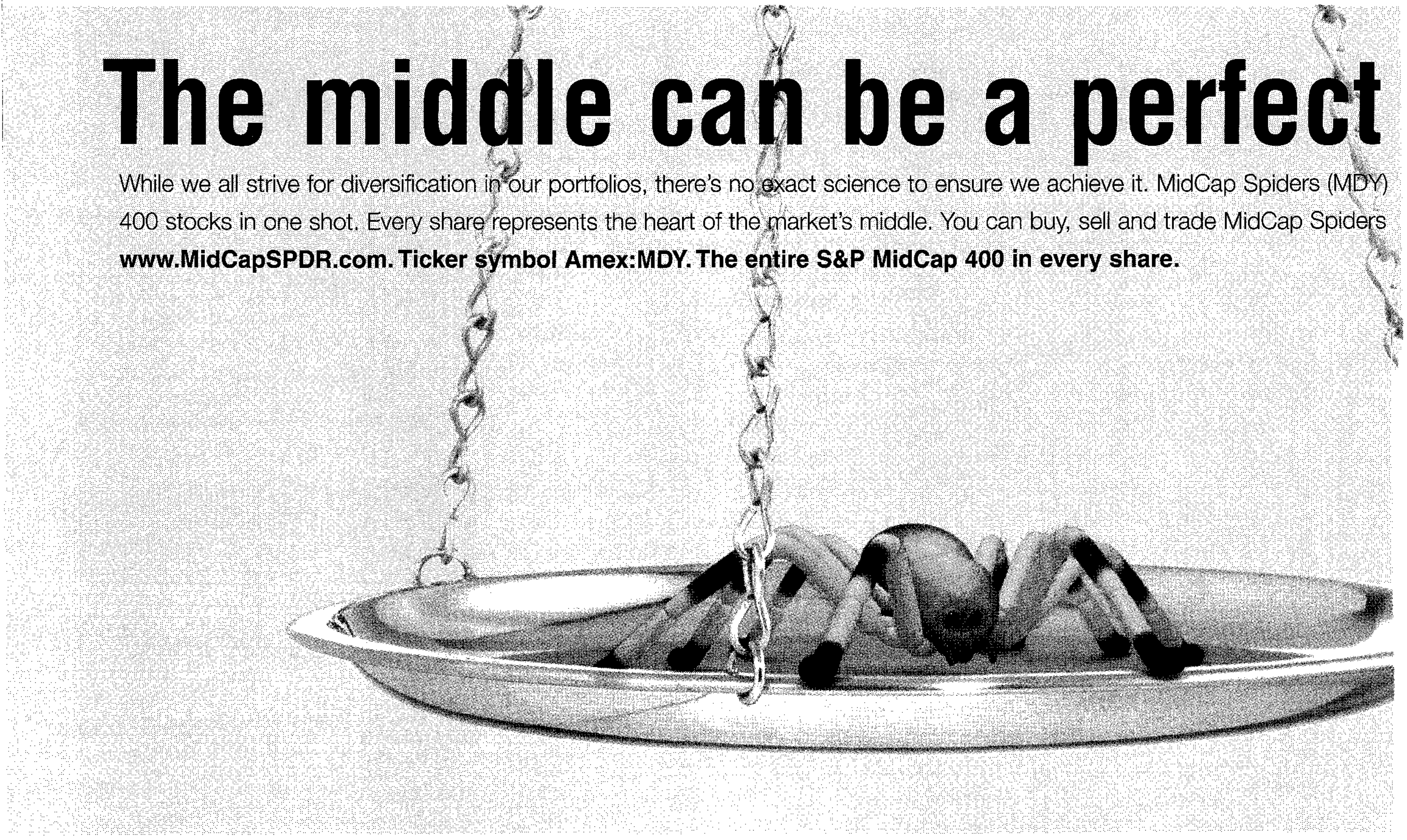
Yvonne Wilder, a twenty-six-year-old business analyst from Cherry Hill, New Jersey: "If I had to do it again, I wouldn't have voted for Bush in 2000. We had a two-trillion-dollar surplus. Two trillion dollars is a lot of money. O.K.? And Bush, in three years he blew over seven trillion dollars. And, I would be fine if we actually would have something to show for that. We don't have, you know, universal health care, we've cut benefits for veterans, No Child Left Behind is a joke—we can't afford another four years of George Bush. It would just be disastrous."

In another ad, a woman in a red flannel shirt, Deborah Wood, of Wimberley, Texas, said, "Let's get religion involved in all this. When you have Osama bin Laden waging a religious jihad—a war against America for religion—and then you have George Bush saying that God is on our side, it's like a huge pissing contest. Who's going to blink first? We're going to have a huge holocaust war if we don't get George Bush out of there." Morris chuckled. "I don't think you can run that one," he said as another cut from Wood's testimony came on the screen. This time, she said, "I don't like to be lied to. I can handle the truth. Where are these mobile labs? Where's the W.M.D.s? Where's the smallpox? If I were a mother of one of those people that were killed—the soldiers that were killed over there—I'd want to know. My kid has died because of you, my kid is dead in the ground because of you. I feel very betrayed. I feel like this whole country is betrayed."

Morris was sitting in a chair again. " 'Betrayal' is a very strong word. Since olden times, betrayal has always had a certain cachet." He sounded pleased.

"I think the biggest thing and most important part of this work is the breaking down of stereotypes," MoveOn's Wes Boyd told me. "The way that political consultants and therefore leaders look at the electorate is sophomoric—they classify people into these groups, and then they think that what they have to do is slice and dice and then communicate to each of the individual groups. It's essentially a process of pandering, and that's not what America should be about." Instead of treating voters as demographic phenomena to be manipulated and patronized, Boyd said, "this kind of ad campaign brings out how impressive the American people are, and how much we should be listening to them, and how much the stereotypes that are projected onto us all the time are bullshit." He saw Morris's ads as "asking people to lay down their partisanship for a second to think about what they really care about."

Last week, MoveOn posted seventeen of the ads on its Web site and gave viewers two days to vote for their favorites. A hundred thousand people responded. The first-place ad showed Lee Buttrill, an ex-marine who fought in Iraq. It will be aired during the Republican Convention. Ads featuring Rick Dove and Kim Mecklenburg placed second and third, and Boyd expects to start testing them and others in various markets in the coming weeks. In the hours after the winners were announced, MoveOn collected donations for running them at a clip of a hundred thousand dollars an hour. If MoveOn's polling



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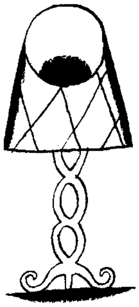
finds the ads to be effective, Boyd will spend millions on them in the fall. “The truth is we don’t know if this will work, or how it works,” he said. But he thought the political climate was auspicious. “People are pissed, they want change, and they’re very motivated.”

Boyd’s assessment is echoed by Tony Fabrizio, of the Republican polling firm Fabrizio, McLaughlin & Associates, who issued a gloomy memorandum last month on Bush’s prospects among swing voters. “Our analysis of ‘undecided’ voters in our most recent Battleground State Survey reveals that they are currently poised to break away from President Bush and to John Kerry based on the following findings,” he wrote. “They are more than twice as likely to see things headed down the wrong track as compared to voters overall. They give President Bush a net negative image rating. They give President Bush a net negative job-approval rating. A solid majority sees the country as being worse off than they were four years ago. They are significantly more pessimistic about the current state of the nation’s economy. They are significantly more pessimistic about their own current financial condition. They are twice as likely to see the number of jobs in their area as decreasing instead of increasing. They are significantly more likely to favor the federal government doing more as opposed to doing less. They are more likely to be pro-choice on the issue of abortion. They are more likely to have seen or heard advertising critical of President Bush than of John Kerry in the past year. John Kerry holds a slight net positive image rating.” In conclusion, Fabrizio wrote, “Clearly if these undecided voters were leaning any harder against the door of the Kerry camp, they would crash right through it . . . which would hand Kerry a lion’s share of these states.”



Virtually all the indicators that Fabrizio catalogued tipped further in Kerry’s favor after the Democratic Convention in Boston. Kerry has responded by making more frequent campaign stops in territory that earlier this year was considered to be unshakably Republican, placing Bush on the defensive. Indeed, the Bush campaign’s advertising strategy has shifted dramatically, from an overwhelming focus on anti-Kerry attacks to glowingly positive spots reminiscent of Reagan’s “Morning in America” commercials—an effort to shore up Bush’s base among precisely the same voters that Morris’s ads address most directly.

“We’re not making any claims about how many might switch,” Morris’s producer Eric Korsh told me. “We’re just saying, Here are some stories of people who have. We hope there are some people who think just like that, and that one of the spots will speak to them.” If Michael Moore’s anti-Bush “Fahrenheit 9/11” is generally seen as “preaching to the choir,” Korsh said, “Errol would like these spots to be a significant part of a change.” Morris was more cautious. “How can people like us possibly know how people in swing states will view this material?” he said. Anything was possible. “But these lives, these voices—I really like them. It almost makes you want to be a Republican.” ♦

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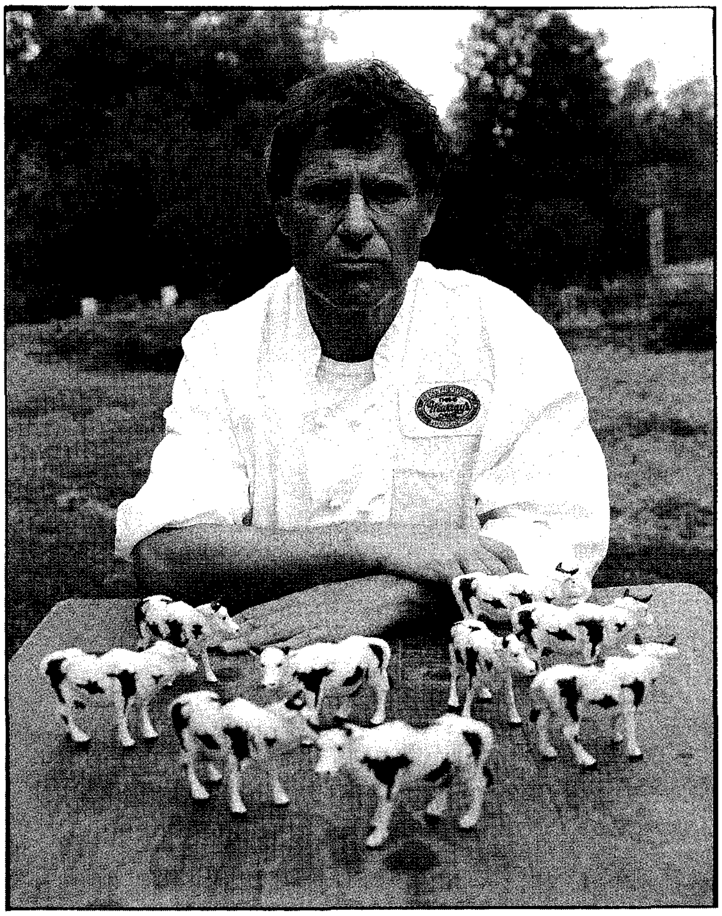
OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

BIG CHEESE

The Village landmark that helped put cheese on the map is making a move.

BY CYNTHIA ZARIN

Before I met Rob Kaufelt, the owner of Murray's Cheese Shop, in Greenwich Village, what I knew about cheese could be wrapped in a chestnut leaf. When people came to dinner, I bought Brie to have with drinks. At Christmas, my aunt, an Anglophile, supplied Stilton. I made grilled-cheese-and-apple sandwiches with supermarket cheddar, and wrapped the leftover cheese in plastic. (For cheese, this is roughly the equivalent of putting a plastic bag over your head. Use waxed paper.) Years ago, I'd had a glimpse of a different world, where cheese was treated with the easy reverence that might otherwise be reserved for a home-town starlet. It was in Sperlonga, a seaside town south of Rome. On our first two mornings, we bought buffalo mozzarella at a tiny *latteria*. The animals were milked at dawn; the cheese was made fresh every morning, in a formidably clean kitchen behind the shop. It was sublime nursery food, tasting of grass and clouds. We ate it on the spot. The third morning, we went for a swim. When we came for our cheese, the girl behind the counter shrugged. The cheese was no good now. It was done. Finished. When I mentioned this episode to Rob Kaufelt one morning, drinking coffee at the Grey Dog, on Carmine Street, he said, "Fanatics. There are people who think there's only ten minutes in the life of a Camembert when it's *à point*, when you should eat it. Anything else is junk." At fifty-six, Kaufelt is a wryly handsome, jumpy man. He grinned and added, "But they're right."



Rob Kaufelt, of Murray's Cheese. Photograph by Ruven Afanador.

Murray's Cheese Shop is at the corner of Cornelia and Bleecker Streets. (There is also an outpost in the food market in Grand Central.) In the past few years, the cheese landscape in New York—what kind of cheese you can buy, who makes it, who's eating it, and where—has changed dramatically; it's like the moment when black-and-white TV turned into full-spectrum color, and in that world Kaufelt is key. Steve Jenkins, who is the cheese expert at Fairway, the food mecca on the Upper West Side, says, "Rob's a hipster. He's magnificent. The incredible thing is that he found some deep peasant virtue in what we do. Murray's is a vehicle for Rob, and it's driven by him. He was tapped on the shoulder by a fairy who told him cheese was magic."

Four years ago, Murray's had only ten or fifteen restaurant clients, and only a handful served a separate cheese course: Le Bernardin, Jean Georges, Lutèce. Murray's now supplies cheese to seventy-five restaurants in the city; the wholesale division accounts for half of Kaufelt's business. If you go out to supper and eat cheese at the likes of Gotham Bar and Grill, Town, or Daniel, it's probably from Murray's. Even so, the Grey Dog is Kaufelt's breakfast and lunch joint. It's also where he holds meetings with his staff. At Murray's, there's nowhere to sit down—it measures just nine hundred square feet. The crammed, narrow shop is redolent, heady, a miniature city of cheese. At any one time, three hundred cheeses—squat, tall, pyramid-shaped, cylindrical—pack a sixteen-foot display case on the left side of the shop. Five staff people, wielding knives, work behind it, bumping into one another. On the right wall, bakers' shelves hold bottles of olive oil and vinegar, jars of jams and chutneys, and boxes of artisanal pasta and crackers. Murray's sells, on average, between five and six thousand pounds of cheese a week, primarily cheeses imported from France, Spain, Italy, and the British Isles, as well as a growing number of American farmstead cheeses. At Christmas, the amounts triple. Kaufelt has found some of these cheeses himself, in Welsh villages, Alpine hamlets, and on farms in Vermont; many are unavailable anywhere else in New York. In two hours one spring afternoon, I counted eighty-five people—locals, tourists, cheese lovers—who came in to browse, take deep whiffs, and carry away shopping bags marked with the red-and-yellow legend "This Is Murray's Cheese." The store's basement office is reached by an almost perpendicular flight of steps: the most benign adjective that the twenty-five people Kaufelt now employs use to describe it is "submarinelike." But more space is forthcoming: in September, for the second time since Murray's opened, in 1940, the store is moving.

At the Grey Dog, Kaufelt was on the phone with the architect for the new store. In conversation, he repeats crucial thoughts three times; it's a verbal tic that he shares with his father, Stanley Kaufelt, the New Jersey supermarket mogul, who can say in one sentence—in this case, about his reaction when Rob bought Murray's Cheese, in 1991—"I was amazed, I was astonished, I was flabbergasted."

"Look," Kaufelt said into his cell phone. "We need to think about the walls. We need to think about the floor. We need to think about the storefront. Do you have any cool lights? No, not cool-looking. Cool temperature. Yeah, special bulbs. That make cheese look cheesier?"

The move is just across Bleecker Street, twenty-five steps if you bear a little to the south-southeast. The shop will go from very small to somewhat bigger: twenty-seven hundred square feet, including upstairs offices and a conference room. There will also be a climate-controlled storage space in the basement. Kaufelt is buying the retail part of the building, and he plans to rent out part of it to complementary food shops: a seafood store, maybe, or a bakery. But, in a city where the Whole Foods chain, banking on the current interest in natural and organic groceries, has recently opened a fifty-nine-thousand-square-foot store, twenty-seven hundred square feet is nothing. For Kaufelt, the point is that he's not moving far, and not getting too big. He sees himself as a steward of the Village, of neighborhood store owners. It's a quandary: how can he expand his business and stay local at the same time? It's especially fraught for Kaufelt, because he comes from an entrepreneurial family, where bigger is better.

Robert Ian Kaufelt ("My mother was in a Scottish phase") was born in 1947 into a family of grocers in Highland Park, New Jersey. His paternal grandfather, Irving Kaufelt, who emigrated in 1914 from Poland, owned a store called Kaufelt Bros. Fancy Groceries, in Perth Amboy. (Rob's maternal grandfather was a Talmudic scholar.) On Fridays, they made sausage and sold it for twenty-five cents a pound. From the time Rob's father, Stanley, could stand, he measured out flour and sugar into brown paper bags. Over breakfast at the St. Regis, Stanley Kaufelt recalled, "For my bar mitzvah, I got a bicycle. On Monday, my father put a basket on it and told me I was going to deliver the orders!" The year Rob was born—he's the middle child of three—Stanley persuaded his father to close the Perth Amboy store and buy a six-thousand-square-foot supermarket in nearby North Brunswick. Big supermarkets were new—there were only two in New Jersey. Two years later, the Kaufelts opened up another, and DuPont approached them with an offer: the store's butcher would precut the meat, wrap it in DuPont's plastic film, and the customers would serve themselves. Until then, customers waited to order their meat at the counter. "How can you do this?" Irving Kaufelt asked his son. "It's horrible!"

"It was marvellous!" Stanley told me. "You just put it in the case." On the first day, a forty-eight-foot meat counter sold out in an hour. In 1952, Stanley bought five stores, and a few years later he bought fifteen more from Food Fair, a competing chain, for twenty-seven million dollars. In the early eighties, Stanley was negotiating to buy a supermarket chain that was later sold to A. & P., but at the East Brunswick store the landlord wouldn't hand over the lease: he didn't like A. & P., so he signed with the Kaufelts.

By then, Rob was president of the company. He'd graduated from Cornell University in 1969, dipped in and out of the counterculture, and briefly tried law and architecture. In 1971, he travelled around Europe with a girlfriend (she later became his first wife), and they returned hoping to open a bed-and-breakfast in Vermont. Instead, Rob went to work for Stanley. Pathmark had pioneered one-stop shopping—in addition to groceries, it ran a pharmacy and a photo shop, and sold beauty aids—and it was beginning to dominate the business. Between 1978 and 1979, the Kaufelts

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had tripled the size of their company, Mayfair Supermarkets, but were losing money, and it seemed to Rob that what they needed was their own identity. Interesting things were happening in New York: at Dean & DeLuca, Zabar’s, and Balducci’s, the emphasis was on food, not price. He decided that Mayfair should follow their example, and focus on quality and service. He was also interested in prepared foods, which, according to Kaufelt, were becoming popular not just because more women were working (“Nah, I don’t think grocers are that clever”) but because it made sense for the retailer. “The grocers realized, ‘I can cook the produce, I can cook the meat, I can cook the chicken I didn’t sell the day before, and I can make twice as much money!’ It’s not a glamorous notion. But once quality is in the equation it becomes about the perception of value.”

He prevailed on his father to let him try innovations in East Brunswick: a bakery; fish displayed European style, on ice; a salad bar, which was a good way to salvage vegetables that would otherwise go bad; a custom butcher shop in addition to prepackaged meat; fresh pasta made to order from hand-cut dies. Their average cost to fix up a new venue was two hundred thousand dollars. Several months into the project, they were a million dollars over budget. The Kaufelts liked to open new stores in September. October passed, then November. “I was completely beside myself,” Rob recalls. “Stanley said, ‘Stop screwing around and open it!’ ” Rob was so nervous that one morning, on the way to work, he drove under a jackknifed truck. He woke up in the hospital. That weekend, his family opened the store without him.

The average profit margin in the supermarket business is about two per cent. Before the renovation, the East Brunswick store’s gross weekly sales were a hundred and sixty thousand dollars; the first week in the new store, the Kaufelts took in a million dollars. (The gross levelled off to about six hundred thousand dollars weekly.) In 1980, Mayfair Supermarkets was a public company, trading under the name Foodtown, at two dollars a share. Within two years, it had revamped many of its existing stores. The stock price skyrocketed and the stock split twice. In 1982, Foodtown had one of the greatest increases in percentage return on equity on the stock exchange. In the following years, many more upscale supermarkets opened, and one result was that many local retailers (bakeries, fish markets, butchers) in New Jersey and elsewhere went out of business.

Rob Kaufelt left the company in 1985. “Dad and I were not getting along,” he says. “I was thirty-eight. I was impetuous. I was sure I was right. I was inexperienced. The idea that one needs to be politic within one’s own organization and staff—it didn’t occur to me.”

At the end of that year, he opened a specialty food store in Summit, New Jersey, and, two years later, one in Princeton, called Kaufelt’s Fancy Groceries, in honor of his grandfather. (Kaufelt told me, “I have a romantic vision of my grandfather’s shop. I think I have a romantic vision, period.”) After the crash of 1987, the Princeton store went out of business. Kaufelt sold the remaining store and left New Jersey for Manhattan—he’d been living in Princeton—eventually moving to 17 Cornelia Street, just up the block from the original Murray’s Cheese Shop. (He currently owns a house on Greenwich Avenue.) Murray Greenberg, who had fought in the Spanish Civil War—“New York has had a fair number of Marxist capitalists shrewd with a buck,” Kaufelt says—opened the store in 1940, when the neighborhood was almost entirely Italian. (A number of local stores survive from that time: Faicco’s pork store, O. Ottomanelli’s & Sons meat market, and Rocco’s Pastry Shop; A. Zito & Sons bakery closed in May.) Almost everyone had a big family, and everyone shopped at Murray’s for pasta, olive oil, parmesan, and provolone. “In the cheese business, there has always been a gray market,” Kaufelt said. “Back then, everyone paid cash. New York industrial cheddar came in forty-pound blocks, and it got moldy quick. They’d buy it for fifty cents a pound, scrape off the mold, and sell it for one-fifty. Later, they bought Brie that was starting to run, took the skin off, spooned it into containers, and called it Brie spread.”

Who bought it? I asked.

“Everyone bought it. You bought it. The upscale of 1984.”

One day in 1991, Kaufelt was standing in line at Murray’s to buy cold cuts and heard that Louis Tudda, who had bought the store after Murray Greenberg retired, in the nineteen-sixties, had lost his lease. Tudda was working behind the counter, and Kaufelt suggested that he move across the street; Durando’s, an old butcher shop, had recently closed. But Tudda wanted to retire; he wanted to move to Italy. “So I bought it,” Kaufelt told me, grinning. “Louis said, ‘There’s nothing to buy—I’ve got no inventory, no equipment.’ ” Kaufelt paid fifty thousand dollars for the name and remaining stock, moved the store to Durando’s, and hung a photograph of his grandfather’s Perth Amboy store above the register. He shook his head. “Durando told me, ‘I was a shepherd in Sicily. When a guy messed with my sheep, I hit him with a two-by-four.’ ” He paused and added, “When I told my father I had bought a cheese shop on Cornelia Street, he said, ‘You’re out of your fucking mind.’ ” Kaufelt knew next to nothing about cheese. And in those low-fat, low-cholesterol days few people were interested in it.

In 1995, Stanley Kaufelt sold Mayfair Supermarkets, which then owned and operated about thirty stores in New Jersey, with gross sales of more than six hundred million dollars annually, to Ahold, a Dutch conglomerate. He and Rob’s mother, Florence, now live in Boca Raton. Florence jokes, “When our friends in Florida hear about Murray’s, they think we rejected Rob and he had to go into business by himself.”

When Rob Kaufelt showed up in the Village, other changes were occurring: Cornelia Street was becoming a restaurant row. Pó, Mario Batali’s first venue, which he opened on a shoestring (Kaufelt lent him five thousand dollars), was at No. 31. At No. 20, David Page was cooking at Home, which featured American food. There was a communal, collegiate feeling, the sense of something exciting going on. One morning, I was standing on the corner of Bleecker and Cornelia, next to Murray’s, with Kaufelt, who was wearing an old tweed jacket, jeans, and a black T-shirt. He leaned against the street sign. Every third person who passed said hello. Looking up the street, Kaufelt said to me, "We'd hang outside and talk. Mario was discovering his Italian roots, and David was discovering his Wisconsin roots. We were all proselytizing for new flavors. The cheeses I was beginning to find were new, but they were old. The chefs were supportive of the old shops. David bought sausages from Faicco; the bread at Pó was from Zito. There was a generation of guys my age who were looking to reinvent food. None of us were really sure we were going to be able to make a living!"

There was a lull in the traffic, and an old woman in a head scarf yelled from across the street, "Hey, Rob, get a job!" He waved back, then said, "Look, some people want to protect this, some people want to protect that. I have the constant sense of something important being lost. Shops like mine are dinosaurs. This one—Murray's—is being saved. I think what I was seeking for myself after I left the grocery business was redemption." He grinned at me. "Of course, it's innately ridiculous. Cheese? Why do we say, 'Say "cheese"'? It even sounds funny!" He sighed. "In my case, it's compounded by the name Murray."

Liz Thorpe, who is twenty-five years old and graduated from Yale with a degree in art history and American studies, runs Murray's wholesale department. She's the face that Murray's presents to restaurant clients. When Thorpe sells cheese to a new restaurant, she often does a mini-tutorial for the staff. Cheese, she tells them, began as a way to preserve milk. There are five major groups of cheeses: fresh cheeses, such as chèvres, which are greeted in Europe as harbingers of spring; bloomy-rind cheeses—Brie, Camembert—which are exposed to mold, form a crust, and ripen from the outside in; cheeses like Epoisses and Taleggio, which are washed with marc or brine; cheddar and Morbier (to which a layer of ash is added between milk from the morning and the afternoon milking), which are pressed; and blue cheese, into which mold is injected, producing veiny markings. When a traditional French cheese plate is served properly, she explains, the different cheeses are placed in order from the mildest to the strongest, starting at twelve o'clock on the plate, and there should be a variety of sheep, goat, and cow cheeses. (Cheese plates are so new in most Manhattan restaurants that, not long ago, when Kaufelt asked forty students at the French Culinary Institute, in SoHo, if any of them knew how to serve a classic cheese course, not one hand went up.)

Thorpe usually sets aside a few days a week to visit clients, and recently I went along. Several years ago, restaurants would send someone by subway to pick up the cheese; now Murray's has a driver who makes two deliveries a day. Thorpe spends a lot of time on the phone. Some clients just call and say, "I have four hundred dollars to spend; pick sixteen cheeses."

The first stop that afternoon was Alain Ducasse, in the Essex House hotel. The kitchen is an ebony temple: cool and devoid of histrionics. The chef, Christian de Louvrier, who was introducing a new hundred-and-sixty-dollar prix-fixe menu that day, stopped for a minute to exchange greetings. "It's a busy day," he said. "Cheese—in and out." Sylvestre Wahid, a sous-chef, who was wearing immaculate whites, took two cheeses and vetoed the others. The exchange lasted seven minutes.

After an elevator ride in the new Time Warner Building, a few blocks west at Columbus Circle, we took the back entrance into Per Se, the restaurant opened by Thomas Keller, the owner of the French Laundry. In the private-dining kitchen, the staff was making truffle popcorn. For Per Se, Keller built a multimillion-dollar kitchen, and it has a separate refrigerator for cheese. He offers a composed cheese plate as part of a nine-course tasting menu. (Persillé du Beaujolais, a blue cheese made with raw cow's milk, is paired with carrot slaw, pickled Medjool dates, and French lentils.) A sous-chef, Jason Shaeffer, wanted a cheese that moves spring into summer. Thorpe nodded. She had new goat cheeses coming in on Friday.

Across the hall, Thorpe poked her head into Jean-Georges Vongerichten's new restaurant, V Steakhouse, which was scheduled to open the following week. At the front desk, a few tentative-looking waiters were learning how to pour wine. Thorpe said to me, "The restaurant doesn't know yet if it's doing a cheese plate."

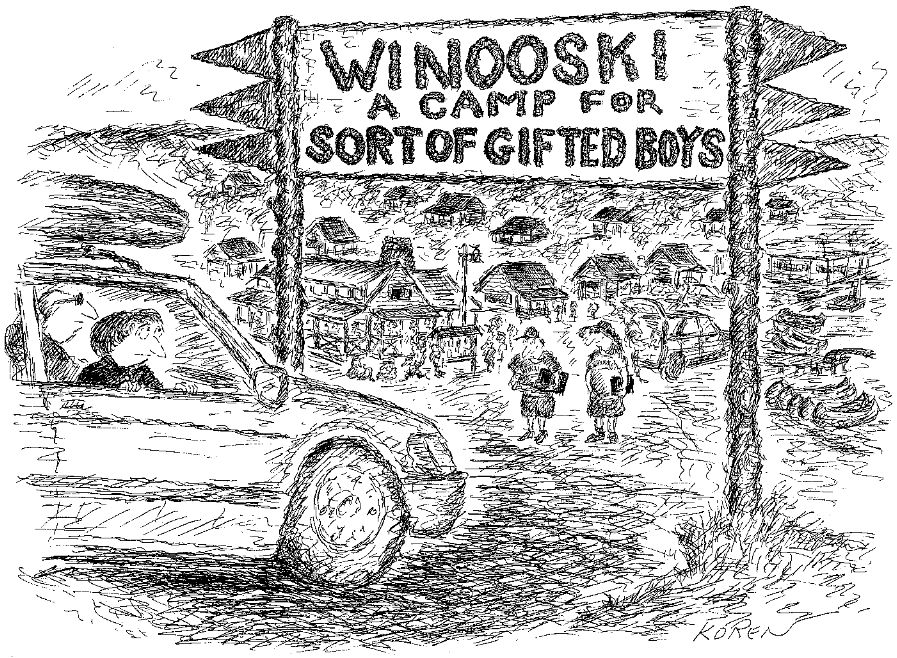
The chef came out to say hello.

"You selling to Per Se?" he asked Thorpe.

She told him she was.

"They have one guy just to do the cheese?" He raised his eyes to Heaven.

The plate-glass window of Murray's announced sale prices for Spanish almonds, fig jam, candied walnuts. Kaufelt, opening the door, said, "We keep finding wonderful things to eat with cheese. You put a scoop of this and that on a plate, and it's nice." He glared at me. "But don't say the word



'gourmet.' It's a bullshit term. Say 'tasty.' Say 'delicious.' "

What to say about food—especially cheese—is a constant preoccupation of Kaufelt and his staff. Each cheese at the store is labelled with a description: Stinking Bishop is "running stinky, bound in wood and washed in perry"—a hard pear cider—"this is a Scottish classic for the cold weather." Vacherin Fribourg, from Switzerland, is "herbaceously full . . . luscious, mossy texture." Alpage Prattigau "tastes like popcorn butter, with age it develops a powerful aroma that screams to be noticed." This penchant for hyperbole, for the language of love letters, is not confined to Murray's. Adrian Murcia, the *fromagier* at the Tribeca restaurant Chanterelle, who buys his cheese from Kaufelt, described Tomme Crayeuse, a French washed-rind cheese, to me as "earthy, mushroomy, decadent—a killer."

One April morning, in the cold back room of the shop—Durando's old meat locker—where the cheese is stored, Kaufelt, with a few members of his staff, including Liz Thorpe and his friend Tamasin Day-Lewis, the Anglo-Irish food writer, whom he met two years ago at a food symposium in Ireland, were tasting products from Niman Ranch, the California-based supplier of all-natural lamb, beef, and pork. (The new store will have more room for charcuterie.) Day-Lewis, a tall, striking woman who keenly resembles her brother Daniel, the actor, lives on a five-hundred-year-old farm in Somerset. (Kaufelt says, "I should move to England, but I'm too nudgy.") She peppered the Niman representative with questions: Are the pigs free range? What breed are they? How did you kill them?

The rep, a small, tidy woman, took a deep breath, and said, "They're raised for fat," to which Day-Lewis replied, "*Brilliant.*"

Then Thorpe said to Day-Lewis, "I went out last night and found my nightmare—the server didn't know what he was doing!" The restaurant had opened the week before. Thorpe was at the bar, and she spotted a friend, the *fromagier* at another restaurant that Murray's supplies. "He's grinning, and holding up a piece of cheese on a fork, and he says, 'Look, Sally Jackson!' The cheese he was holding up was hard, yellow, and obviously aged. So I said, 'That's not Sally Jackson.' He leaned over to me and said, 'I know, but I *ordered* Sally Jackson.' "

Thorpe paused and said, "The point is that Sally Jackson is one of the pioneer American cheesemakers. She lives in northern Washington. She makes only a few two-and-a-half-pound wheels each week, and a grape or chestnut leaf encases the cheese. It's one of the easiest cheeses in the world to identify."

What did you order? I asked.

"Bayley Hazen Blue, Poudre Puff, Constant Bliss—girl cheeses."

Bayley Hazen Blue and Constant Bliss are made in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont by two brothers, Andy and Mateo Kehler, who began making cheese only a year ago. The first time I tasted Bayley Hazen Blue was last New Year's Eve, when Kaufelt and Day-Lewis arrived at my house with two of her children and a shopping bag of cheese. It was tangy, sweet, creamy, velvet on the tongue, the most delicious blue cheese I'd ever tasted. "Eat it," Kaufelt said. "I know where you can get more." Liz Thorpe, among others, already considers the Kehlers to be the best cheesemakers in America.

"Mateo Kehler's not the best cheesemaker," Kaufelt said. "He's just the best-looking. Liz bought his whole inventory without even tasting it! How can I run a store like that? He's the James Dean of cheese, and I've got him in my icebox!"

One of the things that Kaufelt hopes to do in the new store is to continue, on a larger scale, supporting local farms. This spring, when Thomas Keller opened Per Se, he called Kaufelt, asking for local butter. Kaufelt posted an inquiry

PATHETIC FALLACY

When it became impossible to speak to you
due to your having died and been incinerated,
I sometimes held the uncradled phone

with its neat digits and arcane symbols (crosshatch,
black star) as if embedded in it
were some code I could punch in

to reach you. You bequeathed me
this morbid bent, Mother.
Who gives her sixth-grade daughter

Sartre's "Nausea" to read? All my life,
I watched you face the void,
leaning into it as a child with a black balloon

will bury her countenance
either to hide from
or to merge with that darkness.

Small wonder that still
in the invisible scrim of air
that delineates our separate worlds

your features sometimes press toward me
all silvery from the afterlife, woven in wind,
to whisper a caution. Or your hand on my back

shoves me into my life.

—*Mary Karr*

on the Internet. "There were no replies," he told me. "Zip! But we can try to develop these sources, if we can insure a market."

We were so cold from standing around in the storage room that we went and sat on the bench outside the store. Kaufelt said, "O.K., now think of sexy words we can use in the new store to describe cheese." He ruminated, then looked sly. " 'Louche.' 'Thick, rampant blue veins'! I like older women! 'Unctuous'! 'Mousse-like'! I'm the only one who likes these. Everyone else thinks they're over the top. But think of what you can do with just a few notes. What is cheese? Milk. Rennet. Salt. Cheese is Dylan, singing on 'Blood on the Tracks.' "

Day-Lewis looked at him. " 'Mousse-like'? That's insane."

For the new store, Day-Lewis is developing recipes for prepared food—cheese pies, cheese straws, cheese tarts—which will be made on the premises. The dishes, at first, will be familiar but made with better ingredients. Frankie Meilak, who is thirty-five, has worked at Murray's for nineteen years, and is now the store's director of operations. (He started as a stock and delivery boy for Louis Tudda.) He says, "Who else is cooking with Montgomery cheddar? No one. But I know in the beginning people will say, 'I'm not going to pay for this.' "

The Montgomery family of Somerset make Montgomery cheddar by hand. It retails for twenty-two dollars a pound. When Meilak started working for Tudda (who had himself worked for Murray Greenberg), there was only one cheese in the store that cost more than seven dollars a pound, and that was the Parmigiano-Reggiano. When Murray's moved across the street, Steve Jenkins, then the cheese manager at Dean & DeLuca, came in to consult and help find purveyors. Kaufelt sold Brin d'Amour, a Corsican sheep's-milk cheese, for ten dollars a pound. "People were saying, 'You're kidding,' " Meilak recalls. "The old customers were looking for specials—two-ninety-nine a pound for yellow cheddar." Kaufelt started giving samples in the store. Meilak recalls, "Louis didn't give tastes. He said, 'There goes the profit!' But people go to restaurants, they go to Europe, and come here looking for the cheese." He smiles. "Usually, they can't remember what it's called, but they can describe it."

One answer that the store favors when asked why some cheeses are so expensive is that they don't really cost that much. A good leg of lamb can run to sixty dollars; if you serve three cheeses afterward, an ounce of each to six people—even very expensive cheeses—it might cost twenty dollars. Another is volume. Liz Thorpe says, "Last summer, I visited a woman high up in the Spanish Pyrenees. She has fifty goats. It's a solo operation. When her cheese gets here, it costs twenty-one dollars a pound. That's shockingly reasonable to me, when I know what goes into it. Part of the Murray's experience is that the counter people can convey the enormity of the journey when they show you a little piece of cheese."

Cielo Peralta has worked behind the counter at Murray's for nine years. One Saturday when I came by the shop, a man wearing aviator glasses walked in clutching a coffee cup. Peralta looked him up and down and said, "You want a couple hundred pounds of cheese, you let me know." By the register, there's a list of cheeses to push: Brie de Meaux, Crottin de Chavignol, Sechon de Pays. These are ripe cheeses that the staff knows have, at most, a week—they're "pre-bad." But often cheese is best—*à point*—right before it goes off.

Peralta gave a woman who couldn't decide what to buy a taste of Sechon de Pays, an aged cow cheese from Savoie. He murmured to me, "The trick is to say, 'Taste this, darling. It's very good.' Especially with difficult customers. They're the kind of people who like to feel special."

Meanwhile, a few feet down the counter, another staff person was telling a young woman shopping for a party to try balsamic vinegar and strawberries with the Brie de Meaux. She shook her head. "Does everybody but me know about this?"

She ended up spending seventy dollars. Peralta, at the register, suggested that she try the Crottin de Chavignol as well. "You want me to give you *more* money?" she asked.

Another part of the conundrum of price has to do with distribution. The cheese world is an inverted pyramid. At the bottom is the farmstead

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"That's Irv. Took a yoga class, emptied his mind, and never refilled it."

cheesemaker who milks his own animals. Next up are handmade artisanal cheeses, whose milk may come from several local farms. Then there are coöperative cheese factories, which pool milk from usually ten or fewer sources—in France, a coöperative factory may be a barn in the middle of a field—and the industrial cheese factories, which, in the case of Kraft, draw milk from several hundred producers. (Murray's does sell industrial cheese, behind the counter, primarily Havarti, sliced Swiss, and American.) By the late-nineties, Kaufelt was travelling in Europe extensively, tasting farmstead and artisanal cheeses that were sold at local markets but had no American or even European distribution. (In France, many cheeses are made within fifty miles of their point of sale.) He and Valérie Montbarbon, who was then Murray's wholesale manager, decided to import directly from France. Previously, they'd imported cheese the way everyone else does: from large distributors, who bought flats of cheese at the huge Rungis food market, outside Paris. Montbarbon researched customs and F.D.A. regulations, and Murray's began ordering on a small scale—forty kilos here, twenty there, which made trucking both difficult and very expensive. In 1998, Kaufelt met Hervé Mons, who is one of ten master *affineurs* in France. An *affineur* ages cheese. His work is built on relationships—he knows where the animals graze, and how each year's rainfall affects the feed. He buys young cheese from the cheesemaker, brings it back to climate-controlled caves, which are traditionally underground, stores it, turns and/or washes it, and generally coddles the cheese until it either reaches maturity or is ready to ship. It's finishing school for cheese.

Mons, a charismatic, deeply opinionated man, whose father was a local *affineur* before him, helped Murray's upgrade and consolidate its importing operation. (Valérie Montbarbon, who is from Provence, left Murray's two and a half years ago, and now works with Mons, in Saint-Haon-le-Châtel, near Auvergne, choosing cheese to ship back to New York.) With Mons's help, Kaufelt pulled off two things at once: he has cheeses that no one else has, and he has some control over shipping, which Mons now supervises, avoiding what Frankie Meilak describes as "cheese left sitting on the docks turning into crap."

In cheese circles right now, the buzz word is *affinage*. A year and a half ago, Terrance Brennan, who owns two restaurants in New York, Artisanal and Picholine, which used to order cheese from Murray's but doesn't now—opened a ten-thousand-square-foot cheese facility at Tenth Avenue and Thirty-seventh Street and announced that it was the first state-of-the-art *affinage* center in the United States. Some cheesemongers argue that, at least in the United States, where F.D.A. regulations forbid the importing of cheese under sixty days old, *affinage* pretty much means optimum storage, although Kaufelt points out that now that Americans are producing farmstead cheeses you can age week-old goat cheese made in this country. At Murray's, shelves holding unripe cheese are marked "Do Not Pull"; the most fragile of these—the bloomy- and washed-rind cheeses—are kept in garment bags plastered with hand-lettered signs that say, "DO NOT OPEN: A HUMID CHEESE IS A HAPPY CHEESE."

In the basement of the new store, Kaufelt, in consultation with Hervé Mons, is building five masonry caves, three with vaulted ceilings in which to store and age cheese. Questions of *affinage* aside, Murray's inventory at any given moment is worth about two hundred thousand dollars; good storage is imperative.

One sunny June morning, I met Kaufelt in a pocket park at the intersection of Bleecker and Sixth Avenue. He said, "The point is to care for these lightly perishable, young French things. See this?" He gestured to a square patch of rugosa roses. "Someone tends this. They feel *tenderly* toward it. Whey tends to sink to the bottom. Cheeses need to be turned over. The down side doesn't get air. What we want is controlled breakdown. Isn't that what we're all looking for, even in a cheese?"

He narrowed his eyes. "The most impressive *affinage* I've seen is in Switzerland. They age Emmenthal and Gruyère in enormous caves in the Alps. You go through vaults in the caves, like in an old James Bond movie, and way down, hundreds of feet away, there's an enormous robot, six or seven stories high, coming in your direction, very slowly. It takes out the cheese, washes it, turns it, and puts it back in its slot. It does this twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year."

The week before Kaufelt closed on the new store, he was perturbed. He had to see his accountant. He was in the middle of a divorce (his second); he had to see his lawyer. He had planned to go to England; now he couldn't go. And he was in mourning. Next door, Zito's bakery had closed, after eighty years in business. (One reason for the closing is that the neighborhood, which once housed large families who ate a lot of bread, is now home to people who like to eat out.) The shelves were bare. Julius Zito, who was born in the bakery's back room, in 1924, was staring out the window. On the street, a woman in a housedress was yelling to passersby, "Come look, this was a landmark!" Anthony Zito, Julius's son, took me downstairs to look at the bread ovens, which had been in use since 1864, when the building opened as a bakery.

Kaufelt arrived with coffee from Rocco's. He'd been talking to people. Couldn't Zito reinvent the brand? Remerchandise the bread? He mentioned some entrepreneurs in the New York bread business: Amy Scherber, of Amy's Bread; Eli Zabar, of E.A.T. Kaufelt said to Zito, "You wouldn't have to do anything you didn't want to." Zito replied, "What's left?"

Kaufelt and I went outside. He said, "Some people would ask, 'Why bother?' The idea that New York may become like everywhere else is inevitable, or not. A real entrepreneur says about Zito, 'Great! Now I'll sell more bread.' But I want the things to be nice on my map of the world."

One late-spring evening, we ate at Chanterelle. By the end of a dinner for four, there were twelve cheeses on the table and twenty-four glasses of wine. Kaufelt said, "A meal like that is my tasty dream—the *fromagier* knows what he's doing, the cheese is in good condition, the sommelier knows how to match the cheeses." He paused. "But the best food is what the farmer unloads from the truck at market, *and everyone knows it*. A fresh buffalo-mozzarella burrata, filled with cream, in Campania. I've always been partial to dairy." ♦

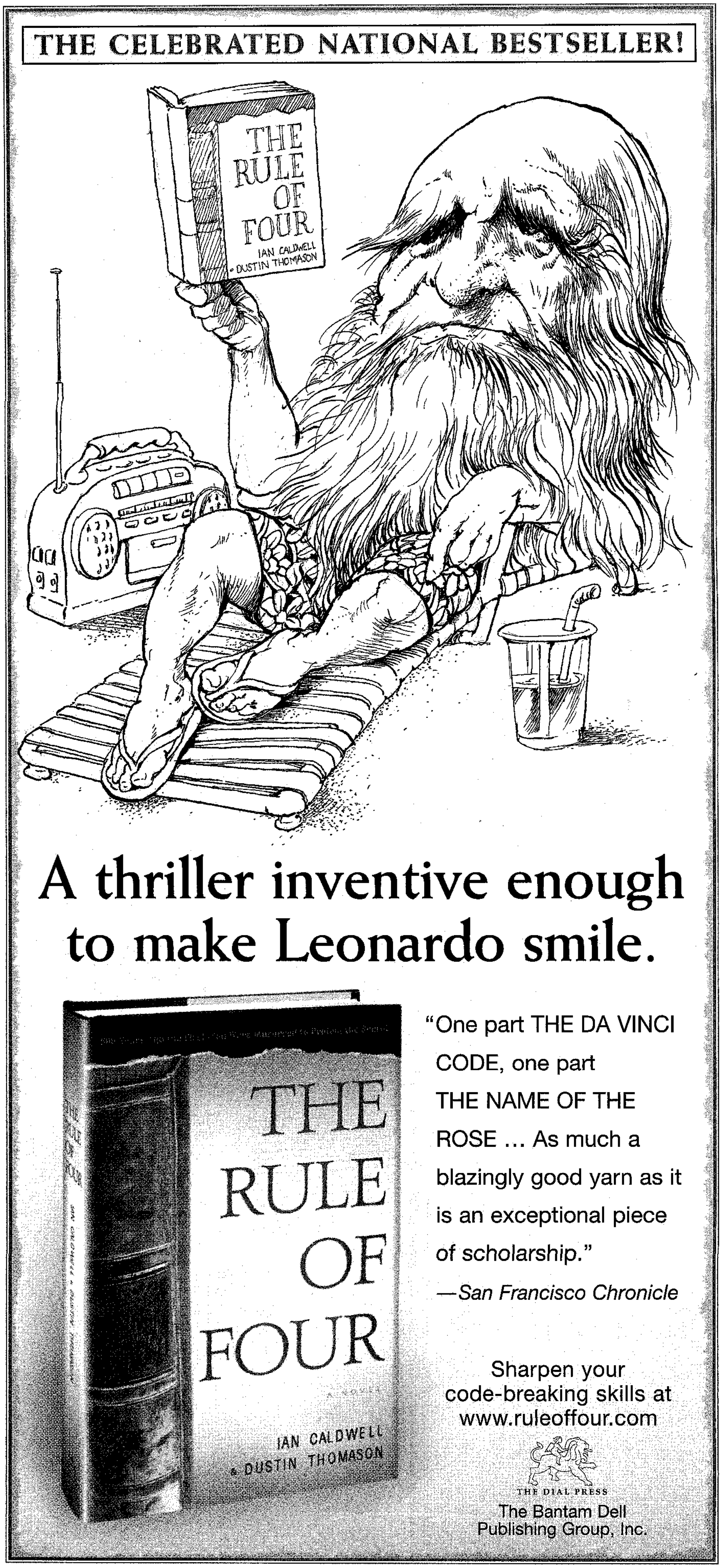
LIFE IN FLORIDA

From the Palm Beach Daily News.

The Weather

Today should be blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, according to the National Weather Service in Miami.

The marine forecast calls for seas of blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.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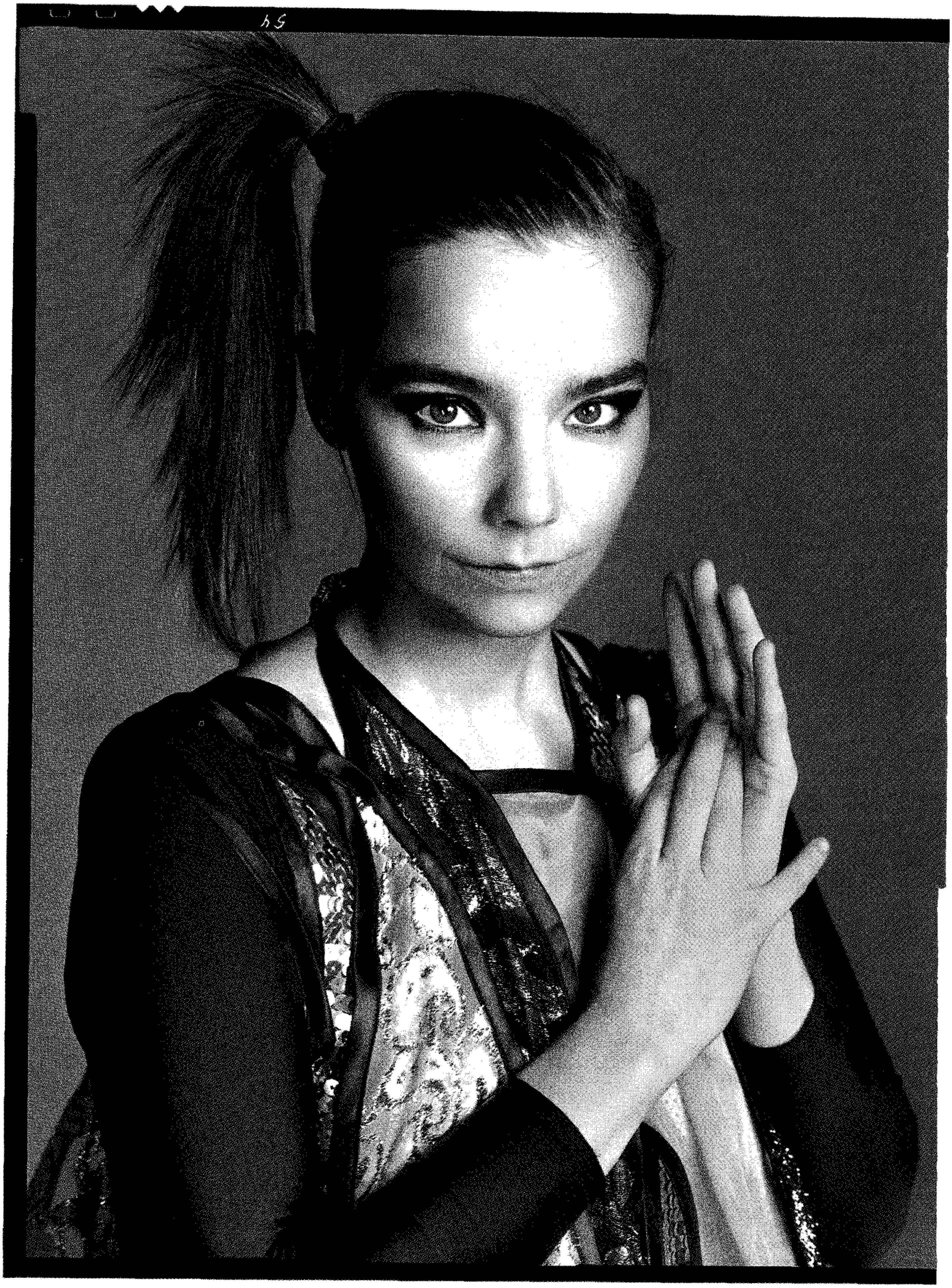
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PROFILES

BJÖRK'S SAGA

The Icelandic singer creates an album of many voices.

BY ALEX ROSS

I first met Björk in the lobby of the Hotel Borg, a funky Art Deco place in the center of the Icelandic capital of Reykjavík. The Borg opened in 1930, the dream project of a famous wrestler who liked to host swank parties for American military officers and the odd movie star. Eventually, the wrestler died and the hotel fell on hard times. In the early nineteen-eighties, it became the gathering spot for a group of aggressively bohemian teen-agers, who theorized punk-rock anarchy at the hotel bar. One of the gang was Björk Gudmundsdóttir, the daughter of an electrician and a feminist activist. She sang in a band called Kukl, which means "black magic," and she outraged older Icelanders with her antics. Parents shuddered when the singer bared her midriff on television while visibly pregnant. Now she is thirty-eight, but she still looks as though she could fall in with a group of fashionable delinquents. She walked through the door of the Borg wearing a ladybug cap and white shoes with red pompoms on the toes.

It was a pale, mild morning in early January. The day before, an ice storm had rendered the city impassable, but some shift in the Gulf Stream had warmed the air overnight. We took a taxi into the suburbs, where Björk was working on a new album. She held in her hands a program for the play "The Master and Margarita," which she had seen the night before. She read Mikhail Bulgakov's novel, on which the play was based, when she was a teen-ager, and it remains one of her favorite books. "The book is very popular with Icelanders," she said. "It has a very Nordic feeling to it, even though it is Russian. It ridicules bureaucracy, it has black magic and Arctic magic realism. You could say it is 'Alice in Wonderland' for the Arctic grownup." I nodded, and glanced significantly at a snow-capped mountain ridge in the distance. "Of course," she added, looking at me carefully, "you have to watch for the Nordic cliché. 'Hello! I am a Viking! My name is Björk!' A friend of mine says that when record-company executives come to Iceland they ask the bands if they believe in elves, and whoever says yes gets signed up."

Björk is probably the most famous Icelander since Leif Eriksson, who discovered America a thousand years ago. Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, who served as the country's President from 1980 to 1996, once compared her to the strong women of the national sagas, like Brynhild and Aud the Deep-Minded. Björk has spent much time abroad in part to escape this monumentalizing attention, which makes her uneasy. Instead, she has ended up with a global sort of fame: as the creator of seven solo albums, involving English, American, Indian, Iranian, Brazilian, Danish, Turkish, and Inuit musicians; as a sometime actress, who in 2000 won the best-actress prize in Cannes for her performance in "Dancer in the Dark"; and, more recently, as a denizen of the New York art-world circles frequented by her partner, Matthew Barney. Her appearance, last week, at the opening ceremonies of the Athens Olympics, singing an ornate new song called "Oceania," confirmed her status as the ultimate musical cosmopolitan, acquainted with both Karlheinz Stockhausen and the Wu-Tang Clan. Though she now spends much of her time in New York, she keeps coming back to Iceland, where she lives for several months of the year. The relative simplicity of the place is reassuring to her. Once, she translated a local news headline for my benefit: "TIRE TRACKS IN FOOTBALL FIELD." A look of pleasure crossed her face as she studied photographic evidence of the catastrophe. "This is so Iceland," she said.

In my talks with Björk, which began in Reykjavík and continued in New York, London, and Salvador, Brazil, she returned often to the "Nordic idea," although she never said anything too specific about it. I think she simply wanted me to keep it in mind. Some sort of Nordic idea is plainly at the heart of her new album, "Medúlla," which Elektra/Atlantic will release at the end of the month. The moment you try to put this idea into words, however, the glacier of cliché begins to advance. Ásmundur Jónsson, the visionary manager of the Icelandic record label Bad Taste, once said that her earliest solo recordings evoked for him a solitary figure standing in an open space; but there is nothing inherently northern in that. Whatever is Nordic in Björk's music is filtered through her own creative personality, which is all-devouring by nature, taking in dance music, avant-garde electronic music, twentieth-century composition, contemporary R. & B., jazz, hip-hop, and almost everything else under the winter sun. Björk has traits both elemental and eclectic: she wants to get to the core of her world, but she also wants to melt it down.

When it becomes known that you have met Björk, people tend to ask, with an insinuating grin, "What's she *like*?" She is expected to be a cyclone of elfin zaniness; she is, after all, the woman who showed up at the 2001 Academy Awards with what looked to be a swan carcass draped around her body. She does have her zany moments—I won't soon forget the image of her dancing down a street in

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

To find a sound she wanted, Björk played Justin Timberlake, then Stockhausen: "It's very simple. A little Justin, a little Karlheinz."

Salvador shouting "Bring the noise!"—but it is not the first word that comes to mind. She is warm, watchful, sharp-witted, restless, often serious, seldom solemn, innocent but never naïve, honest and direct in a way that invites confidences, shockingly easy to talk to on almost any subject but herself. Teresa Stratas once said that Lotte Lenya was "an earth sprite, a Lulu, at once vulnerable and strong, soft and hard-edged, child-like and world-weary." Much the same could be said of Björk, except that she is rather nicer than Lulu—and far from being weary of the world.

Early work on "Medúlla," whose name describes the inner part of an animal or plant structure and, more appositely, the lower part of the human brain, was done at Greenhouse Studios, which belong to the producer Valgeir Sigurdsson. Valgeir is a mellow, soft-spoken guy in his early thirties; he has worked with Björk since 1998, when the two collaborated on the soundtrack for "Dancer in the Dark." The studio is at the end of a cul-de-sac in the suburbs of Reykjavík. From the outside, it looks like an ordinary home, which it partly is: Valgeir lives with his family on one side. The main recording console is in a long room with cathedral-style windows and gleaming beech floors. Downstairs is a small performance space, with an adjoining kitchenette. The place is cool, spare, and eerily neat, Valgeir's T-shirt-and-torn-jeans style notwithstanding. By the time we went upstairs, the midwinter day was already ending. An hour later, a full moon was hanging uncomfortably close. The white-capped mountains glowed in the distance.

Björk sat down to listen to sketches and partly finished versions of the songs that she wanted to put on the album. She had written some of them at the end of last year, during a trip to La Gomera, in the Canary Islands. "I am at the point where I can let it out for other people, hear them through other people's ears," she said. "There is a point where you are very secretive, but then you become confident enough that you can hear criticism, and not become discouraged." I nodded sympathetically, as if I, too, were an Icelandic pop star who has erased boundaries between genres. Björk often uses the second person to close the distance between herself and others.

She'd laid down the initial vocal tracks in a spontaneous rush, standing over the mixing board with a handheld mike—"a big old nineteen-fifties thing," she said—while electronic mockups of the harmonies and beats played on Valgeir's computer. "The album is about voices," she said. "I want to get away from instruments and electronics, which was the world of my last album, 'Vespertine.' I want to see what can be done with the entire emotional range of the human voice—a single voice, a chorus, trained voices, pop voices, folk voices, strange voices. Not just melodies but everything else, every noise that a throat makes." She mentioned as possible collaborators the avant-garde rock vocalist Mike Patton, the Inuit throat-singer Tagaq, the "human beatboxes" Dokaka and Rahzel, and the R. & B. superstar Beyoncé. "The last album was very introverted," she said. "It was avoiding eye contact. This one is a little more earthy, but, you know, not exactly simple." She stopped to answer a phone call about school fees for her older child, Sindri, who is a young man of college age. Isadora, her daughter with Matthew Barney, is almost two.

Björk started playing the tracks and commenting on each. Some were full-fledged four- or five-minute songs, with verses and a chorus; others were briefer, more atmospheric, more elusive. Most immediately gripping was a song called "Who Is It," which Björk had started working on during the "Vespertine" sessions. This version began with two minutes or so of vaguely medieval-sounding choral writing, a misty mass of overlapping lines. Then big bass notes began to growl, and in a matter of seconds the song transformed itself before one's ears into the kind of quirkily ebullient anthem that Björk specialized in earlier in her career: "Who is it that never lets you down? / Who is it that gave you back your crown?" Remixed with a few more heavy beats, it could rule every dance floor in the world.

Not yet satisfied with her creation, Björk sat down at a keyboard and worked out new vocal lines to add to the surge of sound at the beginning of the song. At least half the time I was with Björk, she was hunched over a keyboard or a computer, building her synthesis one microscopic piece at a time. She seldom sits absolutely still, and is constantly crossing or uncrossing her legs, squatting in a chair in various yoga-like positions, or getting up to twirl her compact body this way or that. Yet her gaze stays implacably fixed on whatever is engaging her attention; her body seems distracted but her mind is not.

At around 6 P.M. the next day, sixteen singers arrived at the studio to record the choral parts that Björk and Valgeir had been working on for several months. In the past, Valgeir told me, they had printed out string and orchestral arrangements directly from the computer, using the Sibelius music-notation program, but in this case they engaged a copyist to produce clean vocal parts. Most of the singers were members of a group called Schola Cantorum, which has appeared on several recordings of the music of the furiously original Icelandic composer Jón Leifs. Björk heard the Leifs recordings and liked the chorus's crisp, potent sound. She has worked with professional choruses before, and also with a group of large-voiced Inuit women, who came along on her "Vespertine" tour. (She found them while on a vacation in Greenland, by putting up ads in a supermarket.) These singers, she hoped, would be classical in technique but flexible in their approach. "I want a little bit of a pagan edge, a bit of Slavic," she said.

The session was on the late side because most of the singers have day jobs. They congregated in the kitchen, looking nervous but game. Valgeir placed the vocal parts in piles, and the singers picked them up in a shuffling line. If you had walked in off the street, you might have thought that this was a gathering of procrastinating Christmas carollers, not a major-label recording session. Björk offered bowls of chocolate-covered almonds and raisins. Valgeir's son practiced in-line skating in the hall. After an initial run-through, five Domino's pizzas arrived, and the singers began devouring them. Valgeir hovered in the background, chatting reverentially about Brian Eno and keeping an eye on the pizza situation. Fifteen minutes later, there was no trace that the pizzas had ever existed.

To convey her ideas to the singers, Björk sang, danced, conducted, gestured, talked, and joked. She is famous for using opulent metaphors when she talks about music. "I say, 'Like marzipan,' and they say, 'Oh, you mean dolcissimo,' " she told me. Since Valgeir was upstairs at the mixing board, Björk also took care of some technical matters, fiddling for a while with a malfunctioning Wurlitzer piano and unplugging some unused headphones that were lying on the floor. She was unfailingly, elaborately polite. In several months of recording, I never heard her raise her voice or deliver anything like a firm command. Criticisms were prefaced with phrases like "the only thing I would say is . . ." and "the one thing I'm not so crazy about is. . . ." If one of her collaborators sought specific guidance, she might say, "Whatever hits your fancy. I just like to hear whatever *you* do with it."

Yet the songs rapidly began to conform to the images that she advanced when she talked alone. For the Icelandic chorus, most of the parts consisted of wordless vocalise, but Björk wanted something other than the airy mystery that defines "Vespertine." She asked the singers to apply different syllables to the notes—"hoo" instead of "aah," for instance—and had to rein them in when they started inventing faux-African mumbo-jumbo. In some cases, she changed the parts on the spot, either to clarify a texture or to make it richer. She got very excited when the basses kicked in with Mephistophelian tones; she was depending on them to take the place of the big, low electronic beats that had moored so many of her songs in the past. She assigned them to sing along in the middle section of "Where Is the Line?," an aggressive song in which Björk lays down the law for someone who has been abusing her patience. "More of a rock feel," she said happily. Valgeir looked on with a quizzical smile, scratching the stubble on his face. "We've been talking about the choral arrangement for so long," he said. "It's such a relief it's actually happening."

Later, in the upstairs recording room, I noticed something uncanny about Björk's voice. The singers were in a circle, with a microphone positioned in front of each. Björk was usually in the middle of the circle or on the outside, with no microphone within reach. Yet whenever she was singing or talking her voice was at the center of the sound. You could pick it out in a second from the Icelandic chatter: the dusky timbre, deep in the mezzo-soprano range; the tremor in it, which occasionally takes on the roughness of a pubescent boy's voice; the way it slices through the sonic haze, as if somehow a few extra frequencies in a given range were being twanged to life and sent into action. It carries without effort, like those Mongolian voices which can be heard across the steppe. Somehow, the mere fact of her voice became a creative force, a magnet pulling the music in the right direction.

On the day I was to leave Iceland, Björk decided that I should see something of Reykjavík's art scene. The conceptual artist Jón Gnarr, whose wife, Jóga Johansdóttir, is one of Björk's oldest friends, was having an opening that afternoon. We drove in another taxi—if Iceland has limousines, Björk does not use them—to an old Lutheran church in the center of town. The show was entitled "INRI," and it consisted of a series of photographs of G.I. Joe and Ken dolls acting out the Stations of the Cross. The resulting evocation of Christ's last days was unconventional—only four of the attendees of the Last Supper wear clothes, and the best-dressed one, in khakis and a sweater-vest, is Satan—but if any conservative Christians were scandalized they did not make themselves known. The mood of the piece was whimsical rather than provocative. "Judas looks like a rave kid," Björk said, giggling approvingly.

In the church, everyone seemed to know Björk, but no one made a fuss over her. I had a hard time telling whether the people who greeted her were relatives, old friends, fans, or simply extroverted

"The 'Queer Eye' people came by—but they fled."

"At this point, I think a rich lightweight would be fine."

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strangers. At one point, a blond-haired boy walked up to Björk and said "Hi, Björk!" Björk said "Hi!" in return, whereupon the kid casually sauntered away. Two older teens were dressed in tattered, oddly festooned military-style greatcoats; they looked like stylish deserters from the final Army of the Tsar. Outside the church, a television reporter was interviewing Gnarr. On a nearby lake, swans made a noise that sounded like an anarchist brass band, or so it seemed in this context. The snow and ice melted in the weak glare of the sun. I said goodbye to Björk and took a cab to the airport.

My incoming flight had landed after dark, and I had seen nothing of the landscape around the city. Now I stared in wonder at the miles of blackish lava, at the volcanic boulders that had dropped from the sky, at the conical peak of Mt. Keilir, in the distance. I had gone from a fashionable modern place into a charcoal sketch of an unfinished world.

For a long time, there was nothing where Iceland now is. The volcanoes of the island began rising from the Atlantic twenty million years ago—a geological pause for breath. The island was virtually undisturbed by what the Icelandic novelist Halldór Laxness called "the tyranny of mankind" until about 870 A.D., when Norse farmers began to settle it. They brought with them the lore of the Germanic tribes, which became the basis of an oral and written tradition that changed little in the following nine centuries. The stories of gods, heroes, Vikings, and ordinary Icelanders were expounded in *rímur*, or extended chanted tales. When they are read today, they are uncannily familiar, for they have burrowed their way into modern mythologies of Western culture; Richard Wagner used them as the principal source of the "Ring of the Nibelung," and J. R. R. Tolkien put them at the core of "The Lord of the Rings." Wagner's Ring of Fire and Tolkien's Mount Doom come straight out of the Icelandic landscape. No wonder I felt a chill when I saw Mt. Keilir glowering over the plain.

Until the early twentieth century, the Icelanders lived out of sight and mind, more a rumor than a fact. Laxness changed this by winning the Nobel Prize, in 1955, for his book "Independent People," which tells of a sheepherder named Bjartur, who holds on to his parcel of land in the face of mounting natural and supernatural obstacles. The novel is remarkable for, among other things, its ambiguous relationship with the Nordic idea; it paints an epic portrait of a hardy, solitary soul, yet it undercuts that mythology with slow-burning deadpan humor and blindsiding blasts of emotion. If Bjartur suffers in isolation, the book suggests, it is because he chose to. Laxness's mixture of grandeur and irony seems central to the national character.

Modern Icelandic music begins with Jón Leifs, who lived from 1899 to 1968, and whose 1961 work "Hekla" helped bring Björk and her chorus together. While in Reykjavík, I had lunch with Árni Heimir Ingólfsson, a young Harvard-educated musicologist who is writing a biography of Leifs. "He was a tremendously complex personality," Ingólfsson told me. "To some, he was witty, charming, and sophisticated; to others a paranoid megalomaniac." Despite his extreme individuality, Leifs based his music on a close study of Icelandic folk music: his lurching rhythms follow the irregular patterns of the *rímur* chant, and his craggy melodies imitate a song style called *tvisöngur*. The composer spent a large part of his early career studying in Germany, and remained there throughout much of the Third Reich. His messianic belief in Icelandic tradition blended all too well with Nazi philosophy, which prized Iceland as an uncontaminated Aryan culture. Yet his roiling dissonances and percussive effects caused some to label him a "degenerate." The fact that he had married a Jewish German pianist did not help his position. He and his wife escaped to Sweden in 1944.

"Hekla," which is named for one of Iceland's most active volcanoes, has been described as the loudest piece of music ever written. It requires nineteen percussionists, who play an extraordinary battery of instruments, including anvils, stones, sirens, bells, ships' chains, shotguns, cannons, and a tree stump. During a break in Björk's choral recording sessions, I asked one of the Schola Cantorum singers about their recording of "Hekla," on the BIS label. "That was totally crazy," he told me. "Leifs knew that a lot of what he wrote couldn't really be sung, but he wrote it down anyway. Björk is very easy to work with by comparison, although the music is surprisingly similar sometimes." Björk herself loves Leifs's music. "I think he almost animated eruptions and lava in sound," she said. Yet the composer lived out the tragedy of Laxness's "independent man," who fails to see that his pride is the source of his suffering. In a way, Björk has been working her entire career to correct this mythology—still to maintain independence, to seek the new and the strange, but also to make compromises when necessary, to live in reality, to accept imperfection.

Björk listens avidly to choral music, which plays a dominant role in Iceland's music culture. If one in ten inhabitants seems to play in a rock band, one in five sings in a choir. While working on "Medúlla," Björk sometimes listened to CDs of choral songs by Reykjavík's Hamrahlid Choir, which she once sang in. It is sombrely beautiful music that sets you on the edge of paralyzing sadness, or, perhaps, pulls you back gently from the brink. At one point, she reconvened the entire Schola Cantorum to record a choral arrangement of Jórunn Viðar's song "Vökuró" ("Vigil"), a simple, haunting setting of a poem by Jakobína Sigurðardóttir:

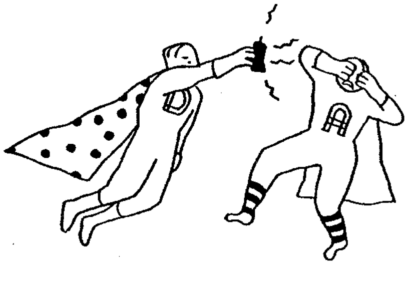
> Far away wakes the great world,
> mad with grim enchantment,
> disquieted,
> fearful of night and day.
> Your eyes,
> fearless and serene,
> smile bright at me.

For decades, Viðar was the only female member of the Icelandic Composers' Society. She is now eighty-five, and her song is the still center of "Medúlla." It might be one of the most purely beautiful recordings that Björk has made.

Björk, like a lot of her countrymen, has a many-sided family background; the idea of the nuclear family has never really taken root in Iceland. Her parents divorced when she was almost two, and she grew up in several households at once. Her mother, whose second marriage was to a rock musician, cultivated a hippie, commune-like atmosphere. Her father, who went on to become the head of the Icelandic electricians' union, kept a more orderly, conservative household. Björk's working methods, which combine elaborate preparation with last-minute improvisation, perhaps reflect this divided upbringing. Her most substantial family inheritance might have been from her grandmother, who could remember the timeless rural world of Laxness's novels and infused Björk with a romance of the landscape. From her, Björk heard Icelandic folk songs, which she calls "old-woman melodies."

Starting at the age of five, Björk attended the Tónmenntaskóli, a music school in Reykjavík. She took theory and history classes, sang in school choirs, and mastered the flute well enough to play an atonal Finnish concerto whose name she has now forgotten. In 1980, at the age of fifteen, she wrote a piece called "Glora," which is the only extant recording of her as a flutist (Björk included the track on her 2002 box set, "Family Tree"); the playing is pristine, the music a little like the beginning of the second part of "The Rite of Spring." Under the guidance of a teacher named Stefan Edelstein, she explored the more radical corners of the classical repertory, gravitating toward Stockhausen, Messiaen, and Cage. Stockhausen remains one of Björk's heroes; she interviewed the composer in 1996 for the magazine *Dazed & Confused*, defining him as a man "obsessed with the marriage between mystery and science." Early on, she made her own attempts at avant-garde experimentation. She made beats from a tape of her grandfather snoring and played drums with the accompaniment of a popcorn machine.

As she headed toward her teen-age years, Björk had shaken off her classical upbringing. She was frustrated by its obsession with the past—"all this retro, constant Beethoven and Bach bollocks," as she later said in her Stockhausen interview. With her stepfather's encouragement, she started singing pop songs, and in 1977, at the age of eleven, she recorded an album of covers that sold respectably well as a novelty item. She formed a self-consciously "difficult" band with other conservatory alums, then appeared with a succession of riotous punk groups, the most famous of which was Kukl. (There was a Kukl side project with the enticing name Elgar Sisters.) Kukl signed with Crass, the English anarchist label, which preached a strict anti-bourgeois, anti-commercial code. But Björk was skeptical of punk's purist ideology: she immediately rebelled against the rebellion.



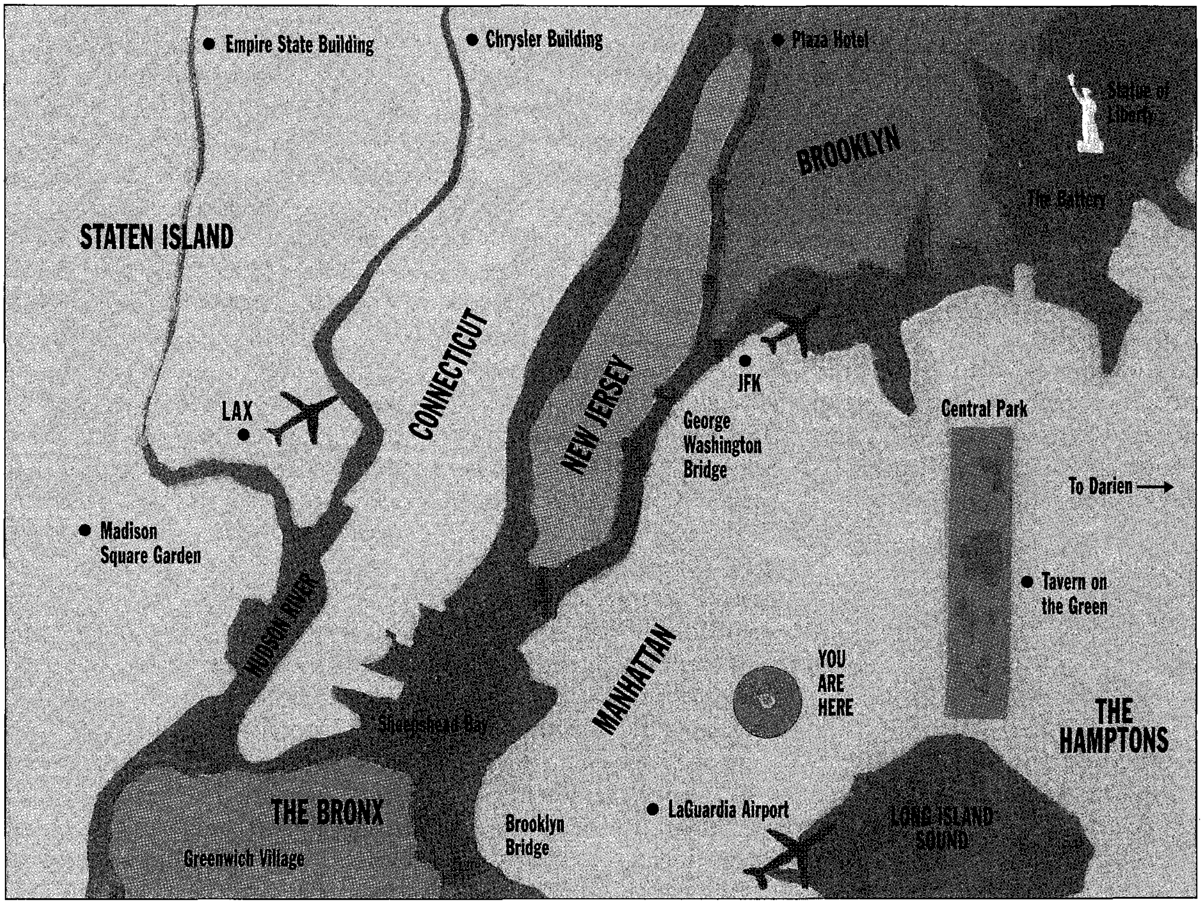
Björk found fame abruptly, almost accidentally. In 1986, shortly before Reagan and Gorbachev arrived in Reykjavík for their nuclear summit, Björk and her comrades formed Bad Taste, originally not just a record label but an Arctic collective, whose manifesto announced, "Bad Taste will use every imaginable and unimaginable method, e.g. inoculation, extermination, tasteless advertisements and announcements, distribution and sale of common junk and excrement." Principally, this assault took the form of a Bad Taste band, called the Sugarcubes, which aimed to send up the kind of bouncy clichés that passed for Icelandic pop. In time-honored fashion, a song called "Birthday" became a freak hit in England, and within a few months the band was an international phenomenon. The alternately charming and irritating synthetic jangle of the Sugarcubes was really an expression of the sensibility of Einar Örn, a poetic prankster who recently released one of the strangest rap albums in history. Björk, however, emerged as the band's most riveting personality. The band ran its course after three records.

By 1990, Björk was striking out on her own. That summer, she went on a long bicycle tour of remote parts of Iceland, stopping in tiny village churches and playing for an hour or two on the organ or the harmonium. From this adventure emerged "Anchor Song," which has a meandering melodic purity that is very Björkian. Around this time, she made a record of jazz standards, "Gling-Gló," which suggests that she could have had a major career as a jazz singer. Most important, she delved into electronic pop, which traced its technique, if not its content, to Stockhausen's pioneering synthesizer compositions of the early nineteen-fifties. She started out listening to Brian Eno and Kraftwerk, then moved on to dance music and rap. She used to take her boom box out into the Icelandic countryside to listen to Public Enemy's "Fear of a Black Planet" at proper volume. It remains one of her fa-

SKETCHBOOK BY BRUCE McCALL

WELCOME, CONVENTIONEERS!

Now that you Republicans are guests in our home, we New Yorkers have put aside all that "crypto-Fascist/gun-nut/social-Neanderthal/greedy-fat-cat" stuff and have custom-designed this guide exclusively for you G.O.P. delegates—and especially for you crypto-Fascist/gun-nut/social-Neanderthal/greedy-fat-cat G.O.P. delegates! Ready, set, go!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JFK
LAX
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Central Park
To Darien →
Madison Square Garden
Tavern on the Green
HUDSON RIVER
Sheepshead Bay
MANHATTAN
YOU ARE HERE
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THE BRONX
Greenwich Village
Brooklyn Bridge
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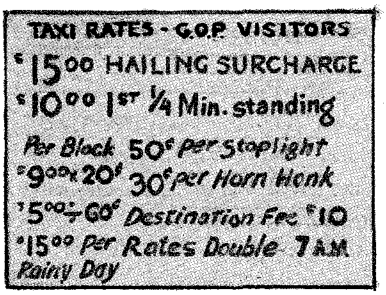
LONG ISLAND SOUND

G.O.P. DELEGATES' E-Z NEW YORK TRAVEL MAP!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$15.00 Per Rates Double 7 A.M.
Rainy Day

Not all taxis sport this sign yet, so carry this copy and use it to calculate your fare.

- Don't be a yokel—take advantage of the special Convention Guest Only tipping rate for any New York cab ride: ten cents, one thin dime. And don't forget to stuff it down the driver's collar as you exit. Wacky custom? Wacky town!

- What's a New York visit without a stop at an exotic night spot? For an out-of-the-way experience sure to mark you for life, try the Ravenite Social Club, the ultra-exclusive hideaway in the heart of New York's trendy Little Italy. The sign may say "Private, Keep Out," but just barge in and give 'em the secret password: "Rudy sent me."

- For one week only, New York's legendarily touchy construction-union workers cordially invite all Convention delegates and their families and friends to turn the tables while passing any building site and scream, "You're all mobbed up!," "Where'd you put Hoffa?," and other choice insults. Go ahead and hurl a bottle while you're at it—why do you think they wear those hard hats? See what prize you get for a direct hit!

DID YOU KNOW?

Every Convention delegate is entitled to one FREE sample from any Madison Avenue boutique. Just grab it and head for the exit.

vorite records; the voluptuous menace of tracks like "Welcome to the Terrordome"—beats and samples stacked up in a droning roar, like Stockhausen stuck on A-B repeat—echoes through all her work.

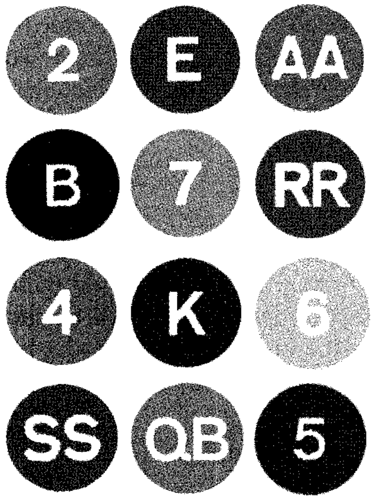
In the early nineties, Björk moved to London, where she could experience electronic music at its most creatively intense. The whomping beats of techno dominated the London and Manchester dance floors, while ambient bleeps and clicks wafted through basements in Sheffield and Bristol. With new digital technologies, electronic artists could cover up the fuzz of synthesizers and manufacture hyperreal, crystalline soundscapes. One of the most influential groups was Massive Attack, which fused the moody pacing of reggae with the sonic depth of hip-hop. Like disco in the seventies, the new digital music often became a backdrop for powerful female voices like Björk's, which could burn like candles in a dark room. At this stage, Björk left much of the sonic invention to her producers, who included, to name the most significant among dozens, Graham Massey, Nellee Hooper, Tricky, and Mark Bell.

In 1993, Björk made a phenomenal solo entrance, singing "Human Behavior" on the album "Debut." Over a cheesy, funky timpani riff, which was sampled from the Antônio Carlos Jobim–Quincy Jones soundtrack album "The Adventurers," she sang, "If you ever get close to a human and human behavior, be ready, be ready, to get confused." It was a career-defining move: Björk positioned herself as a figure outside convention—as a member of another species, even—while using the second person to implicate the listener in the conspiracy. The songs on "Debut" and its follow-up, "Post," show Björk at large in the world, falling in and out of love with Venus-like boys, dancing at druggy parties, circulating through the rough neon glamour of nineties London. Behind the travelogue of the Icelander abroad was a sneakily powerful thesis about technology and music. She had delivered her manifesto in 1992, when she met up with Massey to record the track "Modern Things." Machines, she sang over a gently burbling electronic stream, have always existed, "waiting in a mountain for the right moment, listening to the irritating noises of dinosaurs and people dabbling outside. . . . It's their turn now." Digital technology, in other words, need not be a sleek, soulless force; it can embrace nature, teem with life.

Indeed, "Debut" and "Post" lack the cooler-than-thou hauteur of many English electronic records of the period—the languor of Tricky, for example, with whom Björk had a short romance in 1995. From the outset, Björk wanted to bring traditional instruments into the mixture; her first idea was to have a brass band playing over severe electronic beats. In the event, she relied on flute, harp, accordion, and harmonium to echo the old world. Talvin Singh supplied Indian string arrangements; the Brazilian arranger Eumir Deodato emerged from retirement to endow techno dance stompers like "Hyper-ballad" with a Nelson Riddle lushness. The intermeshing of acoustic and electronic sound succeeded not only because the production scrupulously avoided the usual formulas but because the songs were stocked with historical cues. Several of them lean on a stately tango rhythm, which supplies a hint of between-the-wars cabaret. The gently rocking chords of "Isobel" are cousins of Gershwin's chords for "Summertime."

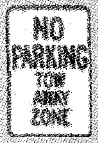
The smoldering nostalgia of Björk's musical material is balanced by the urgent optimism of her lyrics, which seem always charged with the sense that the next moment or meeting could transform everything. She always seems to be exclaiming in breathy terms of some visceral but elusive "it": "I can sense it. . . . It's coming up"; "One day, one day, it will all come true"; "When she does it, she means to"; "But it hasn't happened yet"; "I've seen it all"; "It's not up to you." On a bewitching new song, "Desired Constellation," she repeatedly lets out a high, falling cry of "How am I going to make it right?" Her lyrics, which are sometimes composed with the help of the poet Sjón, are a kind of poetry of possibility. She is unafraid of the darker byways of emotion, but she has no time for free-floating, modernist-style alienation. On "Who Is It," she sings, in a definitive statement of her emotional philosophy, "Carry my joy on the left, carry my pain on the right."

Like the greatest opera singers, Björk combines precision of pitch with intensity of emotion, and any diva will tell you

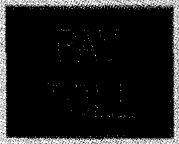


Alphabet soup? Not for the G.O.P. subway guest! You're a V.I.P., so any subway car on any line will take you wherever you want to go. Just shout out your desired destination to the motorman when a train pulls in and step aboard. And don't forget to do the Turnstile Leap, or they'll take you for a rube.

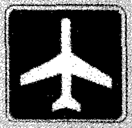
MEMORIZE THESE IMPORTANT NEW YORK CITY SIGNS AND THEIR MEANINGS:



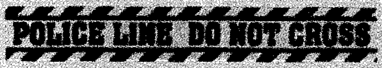
Strictly for tourists—go ahead and park anywhere.



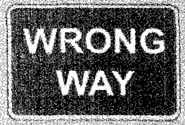
What toll? Your money is no good here. Drive on through.



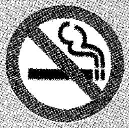
Obsolete! Back up one mile and turn left. Stop, and await airport escort.


POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

Sez who? Everybody loves a juicy murder!



A bluff to keep roads open for delegates.



Meant strictly for kids, so light up and enjoy.

how hard it is to master one without sacrificing the other. If you throw a lot of emotion into your voice, you can easily lose control of the pitch. If you focus on the pitch, you may find it difficult to convey emotion. Something tremendous must be happening in the brain when a singer is able to escape that double bind, and Björk's new album is like a CAT scan of the process.

"Everyone loves Maria Callas," Björk told me, "because she doesn't get locked up in a technique box. She keeps her *rrrr*"—she gestured toward her chest. "The unity of emotion and word and tone. Especially, the purity of expression. Every genre has these mechanical clichés that get implanted in the voices and start to hide the power of words." She sang a bit of rock and roll around the words "I don't know nothing" and made a bit of bel canto from the words "I know everything." Björk manages to sound as if she knows everything and nothing at once.

In February of this year, Björk went to Salvador, the capital of the Bahia province of Brazil, to watch Matthew Barney create a high-tech, avant-garde float for Carnaval. Salvador's Carnaval is not as flamboyant as Rio de Janeiro's; the emphasis is more on the energy of Brazilian music and dance, especially the African-accented music of the Bahia region. Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, leaders of the Tropicália musical revolution of the sixties and seventies, both come from Bahia, and both were in attendance as Barney's float made its entrance. Barney's musical consultant was the downtown New York musician Arto Lindsay, who spent his childhood in Brazil. Björk wasn't directly involved in the float project, but the Nordic idea was manifest in the person of Valgeir, who was in charge of electronic samples.

Björk settled herself apart from the action, renting a house along the beach in the old hippie community of Arembepe, about an hour up the coast. She was having a hard time adjusting to the warm weather and had come down with the flu. The other Icelanders had instituted a minor social revolution at the house. They released a supposedly bad-mannered dog from its kennel, and the animal now happily roamed free with a tennis ball. They invited the house's domestic staff—a gardener, a cook, and a cleaning lady—to sit down at the dinner table with them.

Valgeir had set up a makeshift studio in a ten-by-ten-foot spare bedroom. An old air-conditioner rattled ineffectively in the window. When Björk was feeling better, she played me the results of her sessions with Tagaq, the Inuit throat-singer. The Inuit tribes in northern Canada have a long-cherished game in which two female singers sit face to face and make all manner of strange, rapid, breathy noises, in an attempt to make each other smile. Björk fell in love with this kind of vocal horseplay at the time of "Vespertine"; it recalled the sensuous avant-gardism of Meredith Monk, whom she had long admired. On "Medúlla," Tagaq's artful hyperventilations have filled up the middle spaces that, on earlier albums, were occupied by the electronic swirl.

Bahia was threatening to muscle its way into the already crowded soundworld of the album. Björk had been listening in on Lindsay's rehearsals with a group of Afro-Brazilian drummers, who were to play alongside the float. They came from two Bahian groups, Cortejo Afro and Ilê Aiyê. They played complex, ever-shifting beats with a powerful martial tinge. Björk thought of putting them on "Mouths Cradle," another of the choral-powered songs on the album, in which she sings of "the simplicity of the ghostlike beast, the purity of what he wants." Later, the drummers were recorded, and they gave the music a rough, grainy texture, a propulsive drive. But they weighed on Björk's conscience; they violated the strictly vocal concept that she had set up, and they seemed too obvious a move for a tourist from the north. "I don't want to be colonial, culinary," she told me. "My brain says no, but my heart says yes."

The climactic night of Carnaval arrived. Barney's creation was to make its appearance in the parade of floats as it moved along the oceanfront of Salvador. Björk ventured out in a small van with various Icelanders and friends of Barney's. About a mile from the beach, a Brazilian security detail—nine men in charcoal-gray suits, sunglasses, and earpiece headphones—drove up in a second van to supervise the celebrity visitor. Björk wanted to walk the rest of the way through the crowd, but the security people vetoed the idea. They formed a V-shaped wedge in front, and the crowd parted. Björk sang along to Madonna's "Like a Prayer" on the radio and talked again about "The Master and Margarita," which Johann, her Pilates instructor, had just read. "When I was young," she said, "I was surrounded by friends who were always having these drunken passionate arguments all around me. I sometimes feel as if I read a lot of important books just by listening to their arguments."

Brazilian paparazzi had got wind of the approaching convoy; they swarmed around the van as we disembarked. Indeed, the entire expedition had been arranged with the understanding that if Björk allowed herself to be photographed on this occasion then she would otherwise be left alone. "Robert Altman should make a movie about the paparazzi," Björk said, registering the tension of the situation. "About this little world of people who lurk in the bushes for five days, hardly sleeping or eating, waiting like hunters for the prey, for Lady Diana or whoever. They hate each other, and they hate the prey. It is all about the moment of the kill. It would be a very interesting movie, yes?" She said all this without bitterness, as if she were observing a phenomenon that had nothing to do with her, which, indeed, it really didn't. "Actually, most people here don't know who I am. They just know that I'm famous for some reason."

A little later, we were on a balcony high above the street, facing the old Barra lighthouse. Barney's float came into view, a huge, dark, fascinating thing. In the lead was a big industrial tractor decorated with tree trunks on which phallic candles had been mounted. It was pulling a long trailer bed with high walls the color of rust, on top of which Arto Lindsay's musicians and Valgeir were playing. Björk explained that Valgeir was sampling the sounds of wheels crunching over various wood implements, which had some significance in the Afro-Brazilian *candomblé* religion. She began to sing her own version of a *candomblé* hymn.

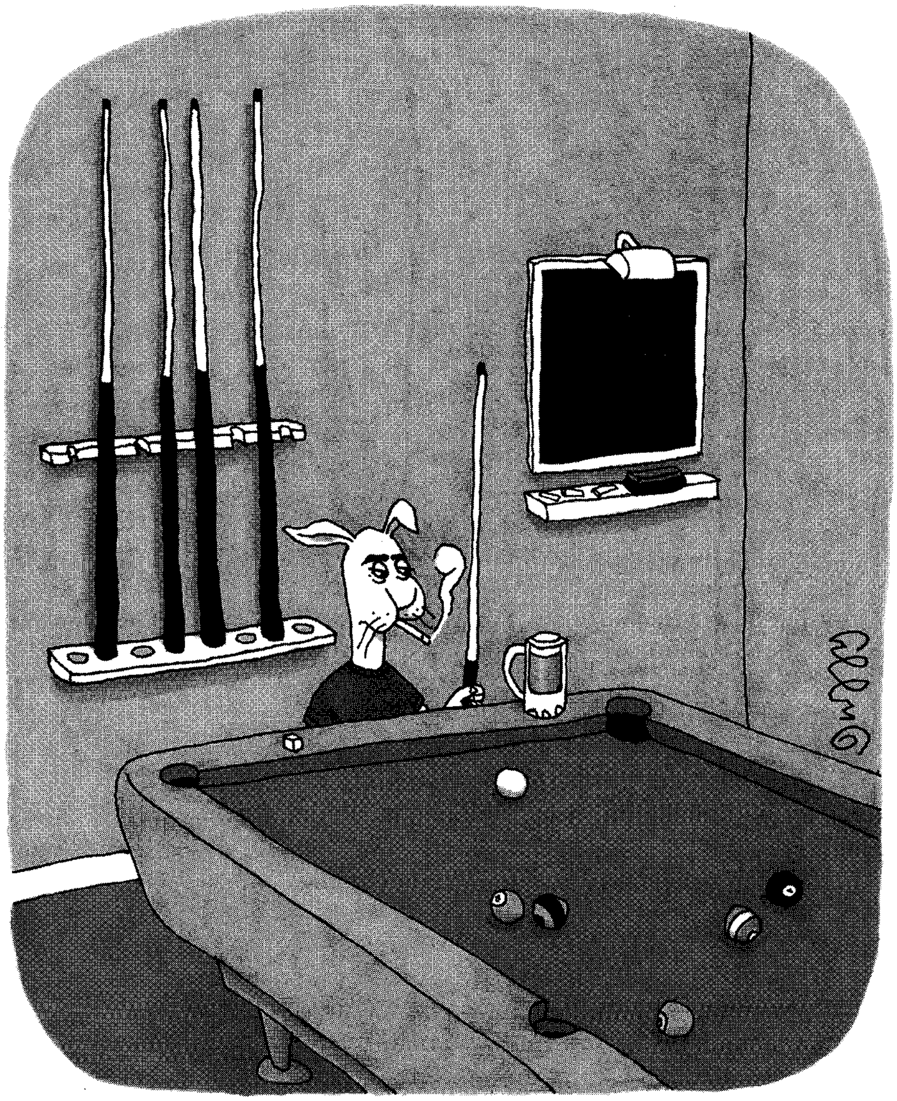
Valgeir, dressed in a lab technician's coat, was hunched over his laptop, wearing much the same bemused expression that he had displayed when pizzas piled up in his kitchen in Reykjavík. Barney was directing the action from the street. Björk waved at them while the paparazzi snapped away and the security men warded off an overzealous journalist who had begun yelling at Björk in frustration. An hour later, Björk managed to shake off all but two of the security people and worked her way into the crowds that were following the floats. For fifteen minutes or so, before the photographers picked up the trail again, she danced along the Avenida Oceânica with a couple of friends. I thought of Bulgakov's Margarita, flying on her broom above the dead lights of Moscow: "Invisible and free! Invisible and free!"

The trip to Brazil felt like another miniature saga, another study in the conflict between the Nordic idea and the infinite possibilities that cluster around it. In a way, though, there was no conflict. Icelanders, in their isolation, have always quilted into their culture whatever useful influences they have found on the outside. They live so far from the rest of the world that they have had to remake it on their own terms. They are icebound cosmopolitans, studying us all.

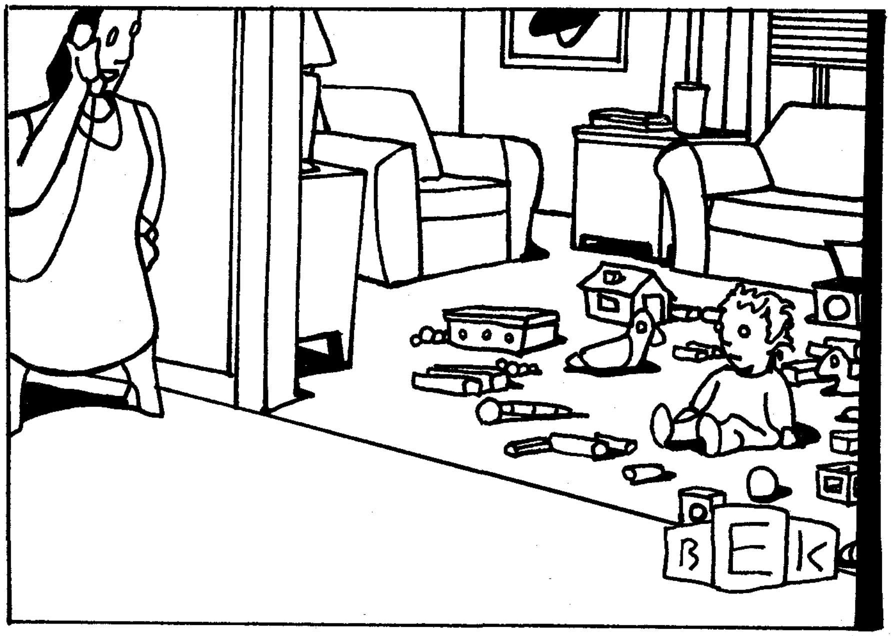
In 1998, Björk moved from London back to Reykjavík. It was the beginning of a period of retrenchment, a retreat from the gregarious, promiscuous spirit of "Debut" and "Post." Her albums of the next few years, "Homogenic" and "Vespertine," turn progressively inward. Harsh, dark tones enter the music. "The album represented some kind of doomsday," Björk said of "Homogenic" in an extended interview with Ásmundur Jónsson, the manager of Bad Taste, that appeared with her "Live Box" collection. "Some kind of explosion had to take place, some kind of death." At the same time, "Homogenic" evoked reassuringly familiar Icelandic landscapes, whether the lush, rolling sound-fields of "Jóga"—written in honor of the singer's old friend—or the volcanic violence of "Pluto," which seems like Björk's answer to Leifs's "Hekla." Mark Bell gave the production a gleaming minimalist sheen.

"Vespertine," released at the end of the long-ago summer of 2001, was a homecoming of a different kind—a swerve toward a more intimate, chamber-music style of performance, without any of the heavy beats that had made her earlier music amenable to clubgoers. Matmos, an electronic duo from San Francisco, wrapped several songs in a mesmerizing sonic filigree, a gentle overlay of murmurs and rustles and clicks. "Vespertine" was Björk's most ambitious work to date; it made clear what was already implicit in the previous albums—that she was not simply a singer with great taste in collaborators but a full-fledged composer with a singular command of melody, harmony, rhythm, and texture. The tone of "Vespertine" is set by the first sound you hear: a half-diminished seventh, an intensely Romantic chord that broods at a slant from a main key that never quite appears. "There lies my passion hidden," Björk sings, drawing the chord around her like a blanket. The harmonic adventurousness climaxes on the song "An Echo, A Stain," in which a chorus sings a huge, soft, shimmering cluster of tones. In front of this dreamlike backdrop, Björk sings more tantalizing lyric fragments: "I'm sorry you saw that. I'm sorry he did it." Put this monodrama in a concert setting and it would hold its own against any vocal composition of the past decade.

While intellectual types have celebrated Björk's recent work—musicologists are lining up to analyze what one scholar plausibly calls her "anti- and hyper-pop"—some longtime fans have voiced discontent. "Vespertine" was not unlike Radiohead's electronically saturated album "Kid A," which in 2000



THE EASTER BUNNY IN AUGUST



"Everyone says she has the clutter of someone twice her age."

• •

scandalized the rock world by jettisoning guitars and guitar chords. But Björk managed to avoid the appearance of writing against her audience, of launching a polemic against mainstream popular music. She has an ability to stand apart from the crowd while not holding herself aloof from it. In private, she can wax critical about a lot of the music that's going on around her, but her catholicity of taste is real and automatic. I didn't hear anything cynical or calculated, for example, in the way she talked about collaborating with Beyoncé. When I asked what she liked about Beyoncé, she answered, with a slightly disbelieving look, "This is an album about voices, and she's got the most amazing voice."

Although Björk disavowed the classical world at an early age, she never entirely detached from it. She has a strong working knowledge of the twentieth-century repertory, and is happy to discuss the pros and cons of Morton Feldman, Sofia Gubaidulina, and Steve Reich. ("Minimalism is my abyss!" she says, meaning that she does not like it.) She has experimented from time to time with a direct pop-classical fusion: one version of her song "Cover Me" incorporates the dance of the shepherds from Messiaen's "La Nativité du Seigneur." Her most daring venture was to sing excerpts from Schoenberg's "Pierrot Lunaire" at the Verbier Festival, in Switzerland, in 1996. She sallied into high atonal Schoenberg at the invitation of the conductor Kent Nagano. "It was an amazing experience for me," she recalled. "The songs left so much to the imagination of the singer—you know, they were originally written for a cabaret singer or an untrained singer like me. Kent Nagano wanted to make a recording of it, but I really felt that I would be invading the territory of people who sing this for a lifetime."

"Medúlla," the new album, performs a typical Björkian maneuver, moving forward and looking backward at once. "Who Is It" and "Triumph of a Heart" will reassure those who cherish the big-time sensuality of Björk's early work. Yet, with contrapuntal layerings of choral parts and tricky harmonies throughout, the record is perhaps Björk's most "classical" and "composed" to date. The short interludes are not so much songs as studies in vocal texture, in the manner of Meredith Monk. They are crucial to Björk's conception of the album, forging the links among its huge array of vocal styles, from Inuit throat-singing to hip-hop beatboxing, with the "old-woman melodies" of Iceland still at the center. I had the sense that "Medúlla" was the realization of something that Björk had first imagined when she was still very young. "Sometimes after a long time you end up back where you started," she told me while riding in the van in Brazil.

After a while, the impulse to find a place for Björk in the geography of popular, classical, art, folk, Icelandic, or non-Icelandic music seems fussy. What's most precious in her work is the glimpse that it affords, in flashing moments, of a future world in which the ideologies, teleologies, style wars, and subdivisions that have so defined music in the past hundred years slip away. Music is restored to its original bliss, free both of the fear of pretension that limits popular music and of the fear of vulgarity that limits classical music. The creative artist once more moves along an unbroken continuum, from folk to art and back again. So far, though, this utopia has only one inhabitant.

In April, Björk went to London to oversee the mixing—the final polishing of the recorded sound—of "Medúlla." She settled into Olympic Studios, in Barnes, a quiet neighborhood south of the Thames. First, Mark Bell came in to co-produce four of the songs, and he worked his ambient magic on them, processing the voices in ways that sometimes rendered them unrecognizable. The mixing itself was handled by another éminence grise of English electronica, Mark (Spike) Stent, who has worked with Björk since the time of "Post." The control room overlooked a not very glamorous English back garden. Adjoining the studio was a converted greenhouse, which had warmed to a boil on this sunny day. Björk sat on a swivel chair behind a ten-foot-wide mixing board. Two candles were burning in front of six speakers on top of the board.

The songs had rapidly evolved since I had last heard them, in a studio in downtown Manhattan the previous month. The session with Beyoncé had fallen victim to scheduling problems, but the beatbox crew—Rahzel and Dokaka—had reported for duty and heated up the sound. If the Icelandic choral singers and Tagaq demonstrated the voice's power to imitate nature, the beatboxers showed its power to imitate technology. A "human beatbox" is a hip-hop performer who mimics beats, turntable scratches, and other electronic effects when the equipment itself isn't available. Rahzel is considered the heavyweight of the art, and provides much of the album's bass end. Dokaka, a Japanese-born beatboxer, lets loose rapid-fire noises in the middle range. You could also now hear Mike Patton growling incisively beneath the opening line of “Where Is the Line?” “Yeah, now it's got some balls,” Björk said when Patton's voice rumbled in.

“Who Is It” emerged as a trouble spot. Björk's idea of having the grand, brash anthem emerge from a mist of Icelandic choral harmony wasn't panning out. On its own, the “long version” of the song was phenomenal, but it sat uncomfortably with the music around it. The minor-key radiance of “Vökuró” was sufficient to anchor the album in the Nordic idea. Instead, “Who Is It” wound down with what sounds like tones of a wheezy old organ: it's actually a sample of Björk's voice played on a keyboard. The Afro-Brazilian drummers also fell to the wayside, hopefully to see the light of day on one of Björk's archival collections, although you can still hear a ghost of their rhythms in the beatboxing on “Mouths Cradle.” There was even talk of cutting the track “Desired Constellation,” on the ground that its softly chiming electronic production, by the Frenchman Olivier Alary, was too “Vespertine”-like in mood. “It doesn't fit into the concept,” Björk said. “But you cannot always be locked into the concept. You have to kick your way out of it sometimes.” In the end, she decided to include it.

On “Mouths Cradle,” Björk was unhappy with the recorded quality of the Icelandic singers. “The chorus should be more in the middle of the mix, not in the background,” she told Stent. “More earthy, more scruffy.” She drew three diagrams to illustrate what she wanted. The first one was a box with a line straight across the middle. “This is the convention,” she said. “Voices this much, beats this much. Now here”—she drew a second diagram, with a thin band labelled “Björk” at the bottom—“this is ‘Vespertine,’ where I was whispering, not taking up too much space in the mix. Finally”—she made a box with a broad ellipse in the middle—“this is what we want now. The voices taking the place of guitars, drums, et cetera.” Stent studied the diagram with a baffled look. It was cogent in itself, but he seemed unsure how to convert it into sound. “I'm just a little worried,” she added. “I'm not trying to be negative. The one thing I'm not so crazy about . . .”

Recordings were mobilized to illustrate her diagram. Björk mentioned Ariel Ramírez's “Missa Criolla,” an Andean folk-song setting of the Mass, in which the chorus has a raw, penetrating edge. Mark Bell downloaded the music from the Internet, but in that version the chorus sounded tame. Eventually, someone found the original recording at Björk's flat. This was played and discussed. Björk brought her iBook laptop into the studio in order to play other music files from her MP3 library. A brainteasing whirlwind tour of modern music followed: a track or two from Meredith Monk's “Dolmen Music”; the Hamrahlid Choir singing the doleful Christmas carol “Maríukvæði”; the venerable avant-garde vocalist Joan LaBarbara and the former Soft Machine drummer Robert Wyatt singing pieces by John Cage. The really dizzying moment came when Björk followed thirty seconds of Justin Timberlake singing “Rock Your Body” with thirty seconds of Stockhausen's “Stimmung.”

“It's very simple,” Björk said. “A little Justin, a little Karlheinz. But not world music. And not pop, and not avant-garde, and not classical, and not church music. Don't you see? Kind of—” She gave out a little roar, with her hand held out in a stylized, iconic gesture.

“Slavic?” Stent asked.

“Exactly,” Björk said. “ ‘Slavic’ is the word. But wi' a li'l bit of David Beckham.”

David Beckham's allegedly troubled marriage to Victoria (Posh Spice) Beckham was all over the English tabloids at the time, and Björk professed to find the story riveting.

“Right,” Stent said, light dawning in his face. “I think I'm getting the vibe. All these things have a really natural sound in the vocal. A single voice in a natural room, like an old hall or a cathedral.”

“No church!” Björk shouted.

“Right, no church,” Stent said. He turned to one of his assistants and said, “Order me a TC6000.” The TC6000, Valgeir later told me, is a reverb device that allowed Stent to add spatial effects to the voices without upsetting the balance.

Björk played the entire exchange for laughs, but, as usual, she was driving at something serious and specific. Afterward, she talked more about her “Slavic” idea. “I use words like ‘pagan’ sometimes,” she said. “But these are things I say just to get something across, not because I have a picture in my head. But there is a feeling. A feeling I carry around in me, and that I really want to put at the center of this album. Kind of like folk music, but without any folk attached.”

She asked me for a precise definition of the word “iconoclastic.” Remembering lessons from Greek Orthodox Sunday school, I said that it was a radical movement within the Church during the Byzantine era to end the use of icons, any visual representation of Jesus. Björk looked a little disappointed. “O.K.,” she said. “Someone told me it meant not only smashing icons but also forming new ones to take their place. Making your own icons to replace the old.”

There were a few more major changes in the weeks to come. Björk recorded a velvety song called “Submarine,” with Robert Wyatt, in the North of England. She worked out a piano-vocal version of “Oceania,” the Olympic song, with the young New York-based composer Nico Muhly; then she decided once again to stick with the concept and use electronically tweaked choral voices. There was some last-minute polishing by Mark Bell. But, for the most part, “Medúlla” was complete, and Björk seemed cautiously elated with her work.

On the last night I was in London, Matthew Barney came to the studio with their daughter. He sat down with headphones to hear what Björk had done. Mark Bell cranked up music on the speakers, to compete against the sound of a hard spring rain drumming on the roof. Björk began dancing slowly around the room with Isadora in her arms. “The pleasure is all mine,” the composer sang, “to finally let go.” ♦

A NEUROLOGIST'S NOTEBOOK

SPEED

Aberrations of time and movement.

BY OLIVER SACKS

As a boy, I was fascinated by speed, the wild range of speeds in the world around me. People moved at different speeds; animals much more so. The wings of insects moved too fast to see, though one could judge their frequency by the tone they emitted—a hateful noise, a high E, with mosquitoes, or a lovely bass hum with the fat bumblebees that flew around the hollyhocks each summer. Our pet tortoise, which could take an entire day to cross the lawn, seemed to live in a different time frame altogether. But what then of the movement of plants? I would come down to the garden in the morning and find the hollyhocks a little higher, the roses more entwined around their trellis, but, however patient I was, I could never catch them moving.

Experiences like this played a part in turning me to photography, because it allowed me to alter the rate of motion, speed it up, slow it down, so I could see, adjusted to a human perceptual rate, the details of movement or change otherwise beyond the power of the eye to register. Being fond of microscopes and telescopes—my older brothers, medical students and bird-watchers, kept theirs in the house—I thought of the slowing down or the speeding up of motion as a sort of temporal equivalent: slow motion as an enlargement, a microscopy of time, and speeded-up motion as a foreshortening, a telescopy of time.

I experimented with photographing plants. Ferns, in particular, had many attractions for me—not least in their tightly wound crosiers or fiddleheads, tense with contained time, like watch springs, with the future all rolled up in them. So I would set my camera on a tripod in the garden, and take photographs of fiddleheads at intervals of an hour; I would develop the negatives, print them up, and bind a dozen or so prints together in a little flick-book. And then, as if by magic, I could see the fiddleheads unfurl like the curled-up paper trumpets one blew into at parties, taking a second or two for what, in real time, took a couple of days.

Slowing down motion was not so easy as speeding it up, and here I depended on my cousin, a photographer, who had a cinecamera capable of taking more than a hundred frames per second. With this, I was able to catch the bumblebees at work, as they hovered in the hollyhocks, and to slow down their time-blurred wing beats so that I could see each up-and-down movement distinctly.

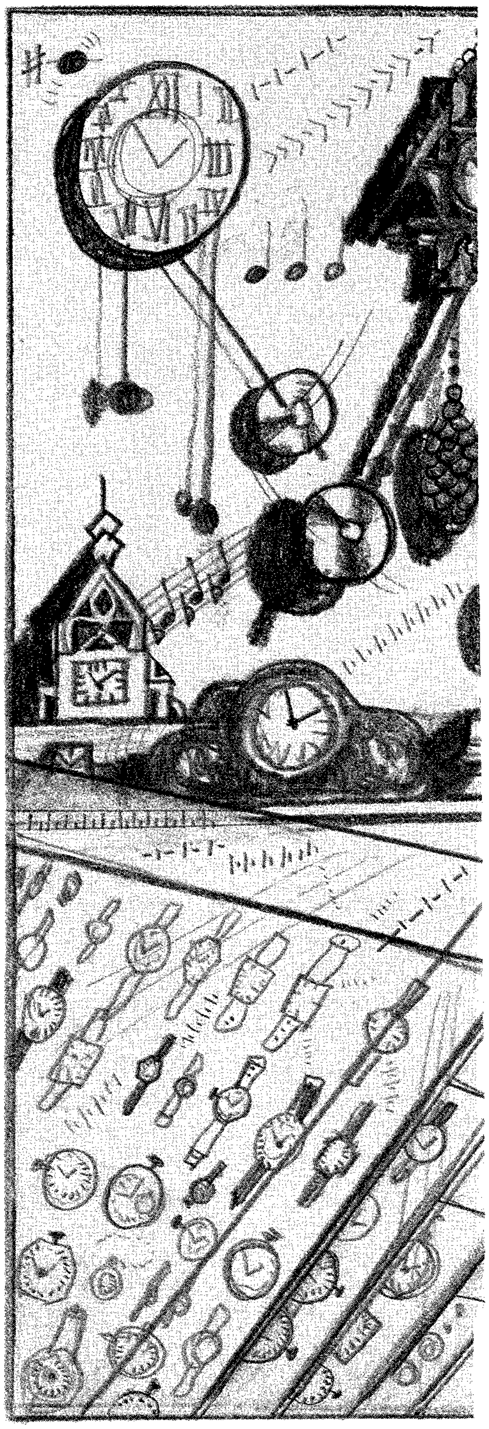
My interest in speed and movement and time, and in possible ways to make them appear faster or slower, made me take a special pleasure in two of H. G. Wells's stories, "The Time Machine" and "The New Accelerator," with their vividly imagined, almost cinematic descriptions of altered time.

"As I put on pace, night followed day like the flapping of a black wing," Wells's Time Traveller relates:

> I saw the sun hopping swiftly across the sky, leaping it every minute, and every minute marking a day. . . . The slowest snail that ever crawled dashed by too fast for me. . . . Presently, as I went on, still gaining velocity, the palpitation of day and night merged into one continuous greyness . . . the jerking sun became a streak of fire . . . the moon a fainter fluctuating band. . . . I saw trees growing and changing like puffs of vapour . . . huge buildings rise up faint and fair, and pass like dreams. The whole surface of the earth seemed changed—melting and flowing under my eyes.

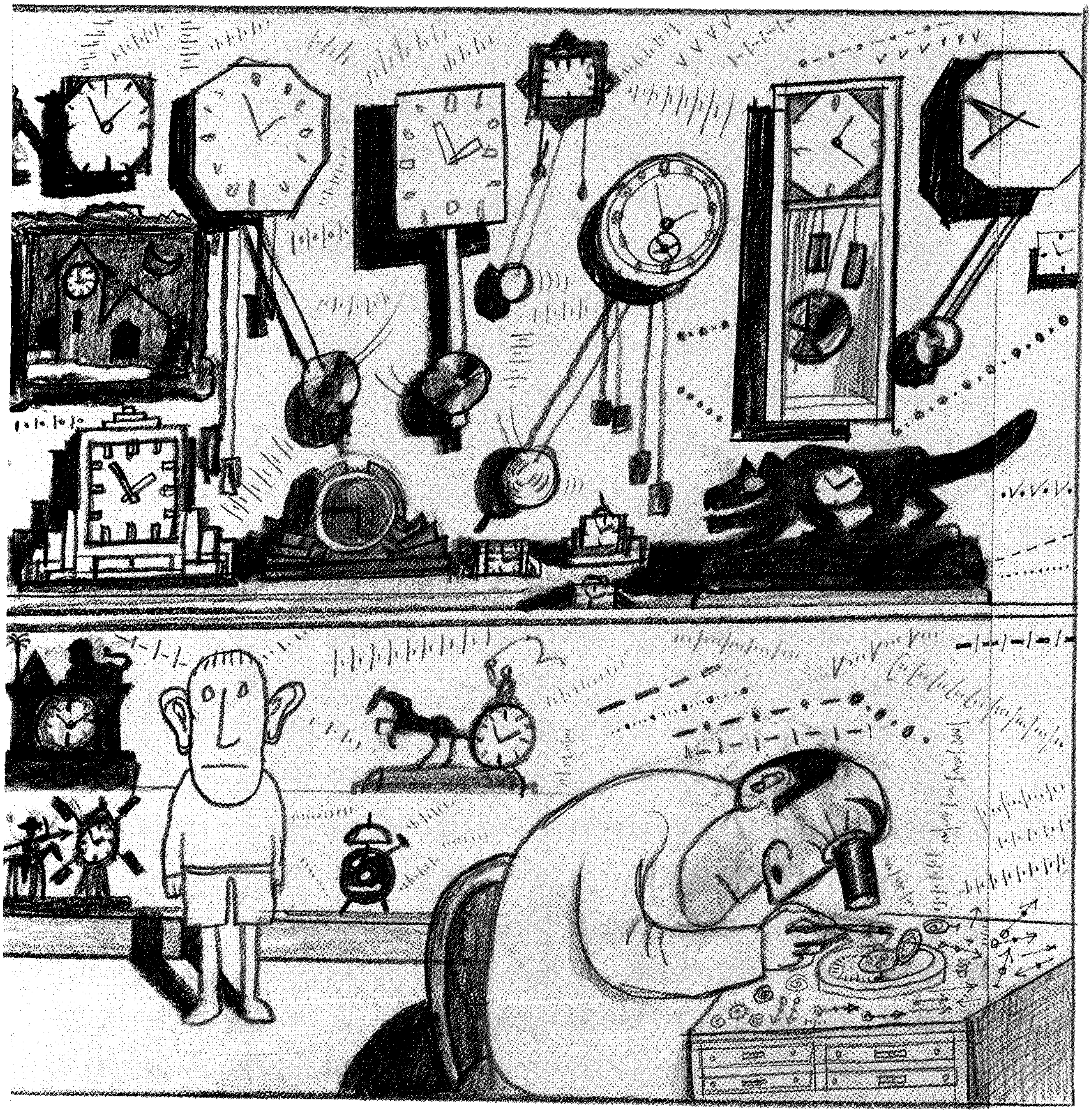
The opposite of this occurs in "The New Accelerator," the story of a drug which accelerates one's perceptions, thoughts, and metabolism several thousand times or so. Its inventor and the narrator, who have taken the drug together, wander out into a glaciated world, watching

> people like ourselves and yet not like ourselves, frozen in careless attitudes, caught in mid-gesture . . . and sliding down the air with wings flapping slowly and at the speed of an exceptionally languid snail—was a bee.



SAUL STEINBERG, "UNTITLED" (C. 1978-79) ©THE SAUL STEINBERG FOUNDATION

"The Time Machine" was published in 1895, when there was intense interest in the new powers of photography and cinematography to reveal details of movements inaccessible to the unaided eye. Étienne-Jules Marey, a French physiologist, had been the first to show that a galloping horse at one point had all four hooves off the ground. His work, as the historian Marta Braun brings out, was instrumental in stimulating Eadweard Muybridge's famous photographic studies of motion. Marey, in turn stimulated by Muybridge, went on



to develop high-speed cameras which could slow and almost arrest the movements of birds and insects in flight; and, at the opposite extreme, to use time-lapse photography to accelerate the otherwise almost imperceptible movements of sea urchins, starfish, and other marine animals.

I wondered sometimes whether the speeds of animals and plants could be very different from what they were: how much they were constrained by internal limits, how much by external—the gravity of the earth, the amount of energy received from the sun, the amount of oxygen in the atmosphere, and so on. So I was fascinated by yet another Wells story, "The First Men in the Moon," with its beautiful description of how the growth of plants was dramatically accelerated on a celestial body with only a fraction of the earth's gravity:

> With a steady assurance, a swift deliberation, these amazing seeds thrust a rootlet downward to the earth and a queer little bundle-like bud into the air. . . . The bundle-like buds swelled and strained and opened with a jerk, thrusting out a coronet of little sharp tips . . . that lengthened rapidly, lengthened visibly even as we watched. The movement was slower than any animal's, swifter than any plant's I have ever seen before. How can I suggest it to you—the way that growth went on? . . . Have you ever on a cold day taken a thermometer into your warm hand and watched the little thread of mercury creep up the tube? These moon plants grew like that.

Here, as in "The Time Machine" and "The New Accelerator," the description was irresistibly cinematic, and made me wonder if the young Wells had seen, or experimented with, time-lapse photography of plants, as I had.

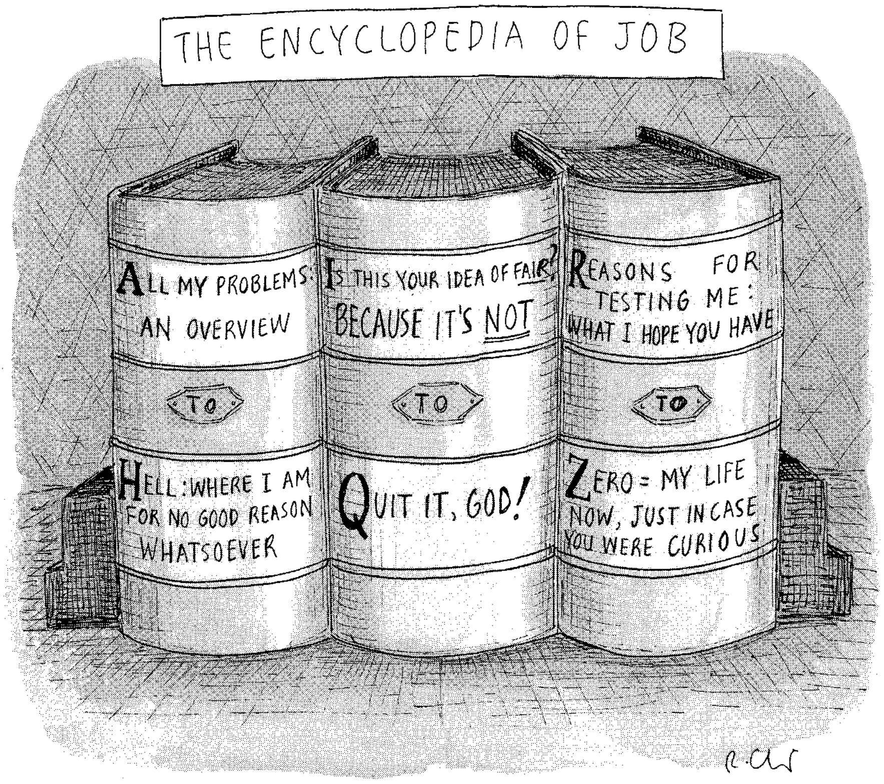
A few years later, when I was a student at Oxford, I read William James's "Principles of Psychology," and there, in a wonderful chapter on "The Perception of Time," I found this description:

> We have every reason to think that creatures may possibly differ enormously in the amounts of duration which they intuitively feel, and in the fineness of the events that may fill it. Von Baer has indulged in some interesting computations of the effect of such differences in changing the aspect of Nature. Suppose we were able, within the length of a second, to note 10,000 events distinctly, instead of barely 10, as now; if our life were then destined to hold the same number of impressions, it might be 1000 times as short. We should live less than a month, and personally know nothing of the change of seasons. If born in winter, we should believe in summer as we now believe in the heats of the Carboniferous era. The motions of organic beings would be so slow to our senses as to be inferred, not seen. The sun would stand still in the sky, the moon be almost free from change, and so on. But now reverse the hypothesis and suppose a being to get only one 1000th part of the sensations that we get in a given time, and consequently live 1000 times as long. Winters and summers will be to him like quarters of an hour. Mushrooms and the swifter-growing plants will shoot into being so rapidly as to appear instantaneous creations; annual shrubs will rise and fall from the earth like restlessly boiling-water springs; the motions of animals will be as invisible as are to us the movements of bullets and cannon-balls; the sun will scour through the sky like a meteor, leaving a fiery trail behind him, etc. That such imaginary cases (barring the superhuman longevity) may be realized somewhere in the animal kingdom, it would be rash to deny.

This was published in 1890, when Wells was a young biologist (and writer of biology texts). Could he have read James, or, for that matter, the original computations of Von Baer, from the eighteen-sixties? Indeed, one might say that a cinematographic model is implicit in all these descriptions, for the business of registering larger or smaller numbers of events in a given time is exactly what cinecameras do if they are run faster or slower than the usual twenty-four or so frames per second.

It is often said that time seems to go more quickly, the years rush by, as one grows older—either because when one is young one's days are packed with novel, exciting impressions or because as one grows older a year becomes a smaller and smaller fraction of one's life. But, if the years appear to pass more quickly, the hours and minutes do not—they are the same as they always were.

At least, they seem so to me (in my seventies), although experiments have shown that, while young people are remarkably accurate at estimating a span of three minutes by counting internally, elderly subjects apparently count more slowly, so that their perceived three minutes is closer to three and a half or four minutes. But it is still not clear that this phenomenon has anything to do with the existential or psychological feeling of time passing more quickly as one ages.


THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JOB
ALL MY PROBLEMS: AN OVERVIEW
TO
HELL: WHERE I AM FOR NO GOOD REASON WHATSOEVER
IS THIS YOUR IDEA OF FAIR? BECAUSE IT'S NOT
TO
QUIT IT, GOD!
REASONS FOR TESTING ME: WHAT I HOPE YOU HAVE
TO
ZERO = MY LIFE NOW, JUST IN CASE YOU WERE CURIOUS

The hours and minutes still seem excruciatingly long when I am bored, and all too short when I am engaged. As a boy, I hated school, being forced to listen passively to droning teachers. When I looked at my watch surreptitiously, counting the minutes to my liberation, the minute hand, and even the second hand, seemed to move with infinite slowness. There is an exaggerated consciousness of time in such situations; indeed, when one is bored there may be no consciousness of anything *but* time.

In contrast were the delights of experimenting and thinking in the little chemical lab I set up at home, and here, on a weekend, I might spend an entire day in happy activity and absorption. Then I would have no consciousness of time at all, until I began to have difficulty seeing what I was doing, and realized that evening had come. When, years later, I read Hannah Arendt, writing in "The Life of the Mind" of "a timeless region, an eternal presence in complete quiet, lying beyond human clocks and calendars altogether . . . the quiet of the Now in the time-pressed, time-tossed existence of man. . . . This small non-time space in the very heart of time," I knew exactly what she was talking about.

There have always been anecdotal accounts of people's perception of time when they are suddenly threatened with mortal danger, but the first systematic study was undertaken in 1892 by the Swiss geologist Albert Heim; he explored the mental states of thirty subjects who had survived falls in the Alps. "Mental activity became enormous, rising to a hundred-fold velocity," Heim noted. "Time became greatly expanded. . . . In many cases there followed a sudden review of the individual's entire past." In this situation, he wrote, there was "no anxiety" but, rather, "profound acceptance."

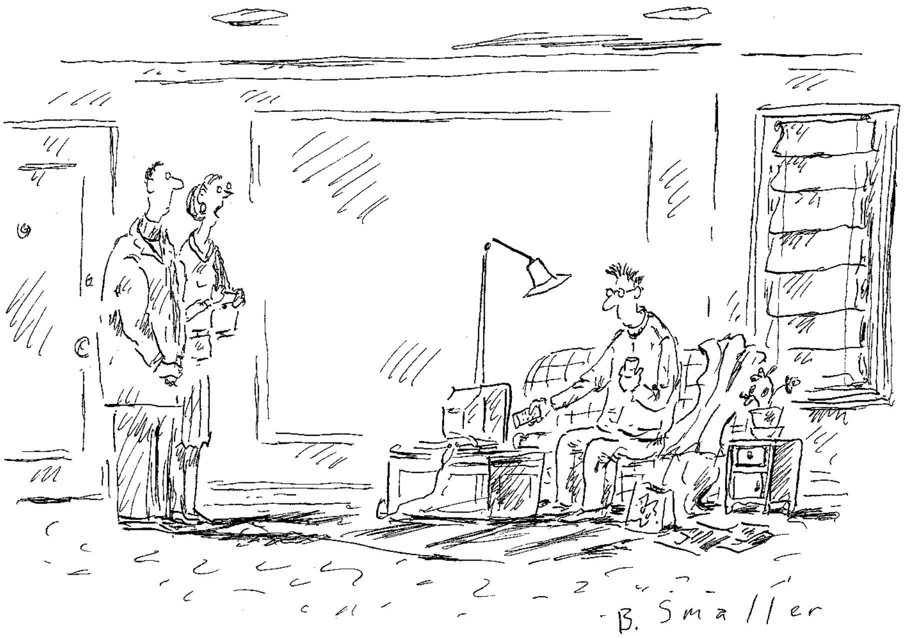
Almost a century later, in the nineteen-seventies, Russell Noyes and Roy Kletti, of the University of Iowa, exhumed and translated Heim's study and went on to collect and analyze more than two hundred accounts of such experiences. Most of their subjects, like Heim's, described an increased speed of thought and an apparent slowing of time during what they thought to be their last moments.

A race-car driver who was thrown thirty feet into the air in a crash said, "It seemed like the whole thing took forever. Everything was in slow motion, and it seemed to me like I was a player on a stage and could see myself tumbling over and over . . . as though I sat in the stands and saw it all happening . . . but I was not frightened." Another driver, cresting a hill at high speed and finding himself a hundred feet from a train which he was sure would kill him, observed, "As the train went by, I saw the engineer's face. It was like a movie run slowly, so that the frames progress with a jerky motion. That was how I saw his face."

While some of these near-death experiences are marked by a sense of helplessness and passivity, even dissociation, in others there is an intense sense of immediacy and reality, and a dramatic acceleration of thought and perception and reaction, which allow one to negotiate danger successfully. Noyes and Kletti describe a jet pilot who faced almost certain death when his plane was improperly launched from its carrier: "I vividly recalled, in a matter of about three seconds, over a dozen actions necessary to successful recovery of flight attitude. The procedures I needed were readily available. I had almost total recall and felt in complete control."

Many of their subjects, Noyes and Kletti said, felt that "they performed feats, both mental and physical, of which they would ordinarily have been incapable."

It may be similar, in a way, with trained athletes, especially those in games demanding fast reaction times. A baseball may be approaching at close to a hundred miles per hour, and yet, as many people have described, the ball may seem to be almost immobile in the air, its very seams strikingly visible, and the batter finds himself in a suddenly enlarged and spacious timescape, where he has all the time he needs to hit the ball.



"That's my old boyfriend. He's just staying here through the transition period."

In a bicycle race, cyclists may be moving at nearly forty miles per hour, separated only by inches. The situation, to an onlooker, looks precarious in the extreme, and, indeed, the cyclists may be mere milliseconds away from each other. The slightest error may lead to a multiple crash. But to the cyclists themselves, concentrating intensely, everything seems to be moving in relatively slow motion, and there is ample room and time, enough to allow improvisation and intricate maneuverings.

The dazzling speed of martial-arts masters, the movements too fast for the untrained eye to follow, may be executed, in the performer's mind, with an almost balletic deliberation and grace, what trainers and coaches like to call "relaxed concentration." This alteration in the perception of speed is often conveyed in movies like "The Matrix" by alternating accelerated and slowed-down versions of the action.

The expertise of athletes (whatever their innate gifts) is only to be acquired by years of dedicated practice and training. At first, an intense conscious effort and attention are necessary to learn every nuance of technique and timing. But at some point the basic skills and their neural representation become so ingrained in the nervous system as to be almost second nature, no longer in need of conscious effort or decision. One level of brain activity may be working automatically, while another, the conscious level, is fashioning a perception of time, a perception which is elastic, and can be compressed or expanded.

In the nineteen-sixties, the American neurophysiologist Benjamin Libet, investigating how simple motor decisions were made, found that brain signals indicating an act of decision could be detected several hundred milliseconds *before* there was any conscious awareness of it. A champion sprinter may be up and running, and already sixteen or eighteen feet into the race before he is consciously aware that the starting gun has fired. (He can be off the blocks in a hundred and thirty milliseconds, whereas the conscious registration of the gunshot requires four hundred milliseconds or more.) The runner's belief that he consciously heard the gun and then, immediately, exploded off the blocks is an illusion made possible, Libet would suggest, because the mind "antedates" the sound of the gun by almost half a second.

Such a reordering of time, like the apparent compression or expansion of time, raises the question of how we normally perceive time. William James speculated that our judgment of time, our speed of perception, depends on how many "events" we can perceive in a given unit of time.

There is much to suggest that conscious perception (at least, visual perception) is not continuous but consists of discrete moments, like the frames of a movie, which are then blended to give an appearance of continuity. No such partitioning of time, it would seem, occurs in rapid, automatic actions, such as returning a tennis shot or hitting a baseball. Christof Koch, a neuroscientist at Caltech, distinguishes between "behavior" and "experience," and proposes that "behavior may be executed in a smooth fashion, while experience may be structured in discrete intervals, as in a movie." This model of consciousness would allow a Jamesian mechanism by which the perception of time could be speeded up or slowed down. Koch speculates that the apparent slowing of time in emergencies and athletic performances (at least when athletes find themselves "in the zone") may come from the power of intense attention to reduce the duration of individual frames.

The subject of space and time perception is becoming a popular topic in sensory psychology, and the reactions and perceptions of athletes, and of people facing sudden demands and emergencies, would seem to be an obvious field for further experiment, especially now that virtual reality gives us the power to simulate action under controlled conditions, and at ever more taxing speeds.

For William James, the most striking departures from "normal" time were provided by the effects of certain drugs. He tried a number of them himself, from nitrous oxide to peyote, and in his chapter on the perception of time he immediately followed his meditation on Von Baer with a reference to hashish. "In hashish-intoxication," he writes, "there is a curious increase in the apparent time-perspective. We utter a sentence, and ere the end is reached the beginning seems already to date from indefinitely long ago. We enter a short street, and it is as if we should never get to the end of it."

James's observations are an almost exact echo of Jacques-Joseph Moreau's, fifty years earlier. Moreau, a physician, was one of the first to make hashish fashionable in the Paris of the eighteen-forties—indeed, he was a member, along with Gautier, Baudelaire, Balzac, and other savants and artists, of Le Club des Hachichins. Moreau wrote:

> Crossing the covered passage in the Place de l'Opéra one night, I was struck by the length of time it took to get to the other side. I had taken a few steps at most, but it seemed to me that I had been there two or three hours. . . . I hastened my step, but time did not pass more rapidly. . . . It seemed to me . . . that the walk was endlessly long and that the exit towards which I walked was retreating into the distance at the same rate as my speed of walking.

Going along with the sense that a few words, a few steps, may last an unconscionable time, there may be the sense of a world profoundly slowed, even suspended. L. J. West, in the 1970 book "Psychotomimetic Drugs," relates this anecdote: "Two hippies, high on pot, are sitting in the Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. A jet aircraft goes zooming overhead and is gone; whereupon one hippie turns to the other and says, 'Man, I thought he'd never leave.' "

But while the external world may appear slowed, an inner world of images and thoughts may take off with great speed. One may set out on an elaborate mental journey, visiting different countries and cultures, or compose a book or a symphony, or live through a whole life or an epoch of history, only to find that mere minutes or seconds have passed. Gautier described how he entered a hashish trance in which "sensations followed one another so numerous and so hurried that true appreciation of time was impossible." It seemed to him, subjectively, that the spell had lasted "three hundred years," but he found, on awakening, that it had lasted no more than a quarter of an hour.

The word "awakening" may be more than a figure of speech here, for such "trips" have surely to be compared with dreams. I have occasionally, it seems to me, lived a whole life between my first alarm, at 5 A.M., and my second alarm, five minutes later.

FOR MY GRANDSON

This is your first night in Carrigskeewaun.
The Owennadornaun is so full of rain
You arrived in Paddy Morrison's tractor,
A bumpy approach in your father's arms
To the cottage where, all of one year ago,
You were conceived, a fire seed in the hearth.
Did you hear the wind in the fluffy chimney?
Do you hear the wind tonight, and the rain
And a shore bird calling from the mussel reefs?
Tomorrow I'll introduce you to the sea,
Little hoplite. Have you been missing it?
I'll park your chariot by the otters' rock
And carry you over seaweed to the sea.
There's a tufted duck on David's lake
With her sootfall of hatchlings, pompoms
A day old and already learning to dive.
We may meet the stoat near the erratic
Boulder, a shrew in his mouth, or the merlin
Meadow-pipit-hunting. But don't be afraid.
The leveret breakfasts under the fuchsia
Every morning, and we shall be watching.
I have picked wildflowers for you, scabious
And centaury in a jam jar of water
That will bend and magnify the daylight.
This is your first night in Carrigskeewaun.

—*Michael Longley*

Sometimes, as one is falling asleep, there may be a massive, involuntary jerk—a myoclonic jerk—of the body. Though such jerks are generated by primitive parts of the brain stem (they are, so to speak, brain-stem reflexes), and as such are without any intrinsic meaning or motive, they may be given meaning and context, turned into acts, by an instantly improvised dream. Thus the jerk may be associated with a dream of tripping, or stepping over a precipice, lunging forward to catch a ball, and so on. Such dreams may be extremely vivid, and have several "scenes." Subjectively, they appear to start *before* the jerk, and yet presumably the entire dream mechanism is stimulated by the first, preconscious perception of the jerk. All of this elaborate restructuring of time occurs in a second or less.

There are certain epileptic seizures, sometimes called "experiential seizures," when a detailed recollection or hallucination of the past suddenly imposes itself upon a patient's consciousness, and pursues a subjectively lengthy and unhurried course, to complete itself in what, objectively, is only a few seconds. These seizures are typically associated with convulsive activity in the brain's temporal lobes, and can be induced, in some patients, by electrical stimulation of certain trigger points on the surface of the lobes. Sometimes such epileptic experiences are suffused with a sense of metaphysical significance, along with their subjectively enormous duration. Dostoyevsky wrote of such seizures:

> There are moments, and it is only a matter of a few seconds, when you feel the presence of the eternal harmony. . . . A terrible thing is the frightful clearness with which it manifests itself and the rapture with which it fills you. . . . During these five seconds I live a whole human existence, and for that I would give my whole life and not think that I was paying too dearly.

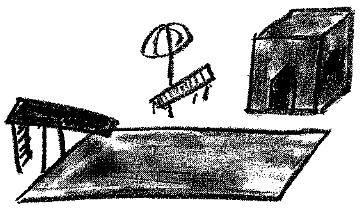
There may be no inner sense of speed at such times, but at other times—especially with mescaline or LSD—one may feel hurtled through thought-universes at uncontrollable, supraluminal speeds. In "The Major Ordeals of the Mind," the French poet and painter Henri Michaux writes, "Persons returning from the speed of mescaline speak of an acceleration of a hundred or two hundred times, or even of five hundred times that of normal speed." He comments that this is probably an illusion, but that even if the acceleration were much more modest—"even only six times" the normal—the increase would still feel overwhelming. What is experienced, Michaux feels, is not so much a huge accumulation of exact literal details as a series of over-all impressions, dramatic highlights, as in a dream.

But, this said, if the speed of thought could be significantly heightened, the increase would readily show up (if we had the experimental means to examine it) in physiological recordings of the brain, and would perhaps illustrate the limits of what is neurally possible. We would need, however, the right level of cellular activity to record from, and this would be not the level of individual nerve cells but a higher level, the level of interaction between *groups* of neurons in the cerebral cortex, which, in their tens or hundreds of thousands, form the neural correlate of consciousness.

The speed of such neural interactions is normally regulated by a delicate balance of excitatory and inhibitory forces, but there are certain conditions in which inhibitions may be relaxed. Dreams can take wing, move freely and swiftly, precisely because the activity of the cerebral cortex is not constrained by external perception or reality. Similar considerations, perhaps, apply to the trances induced by mescaline or hashish.

Other drugs—depressants, by and large, like opiates and barbiturates—may have the opposite effect, producing an opaque, dense inhibition of thought and movement, so that one may enter a state in which scarcely anything seems to happen, and then come to, after what seems to have been a few minutes, to find that an entire day has been consumed. Such effects resemble the action of the Retarder, a drug that Wells imagined as the opposite of the Accelerator:

> The Retarder . . . should enable the patient to spread a few seconds over many hours of ordinary time, and so to maintain an apathetic inaction, a glacier-like absence of alacrity, amidst the most animated or irritating surroundings.



That there could be profound and persistent disorders of neural speed lasting for years or decades first hit me when, in 1966, I went to work in the Bronx at Beth Abraham, a hospital for chronic illness, and saw the patients whom I was later to write about in my book "Awakenings." There were dozens of these patients in the lobby and corridors, all moving at different tempos—some violently accelerated, some in slow motion, some almost glaciated. As I looked at this landscape of disordered time, memories of Wells's Accelerator and Retarder suddenly came back to me. All of these patients, I learned, were survivors of the great pandemic of encephalitis lethargica that swept the world from 1917 to 1928. Of the millions who contracted this "sleepy sickness," about a third died in the acute stages, in states of coma sleep so deep as to preclude arousal, or in states of sleeplessness so intense as to preclude sedation. Some of the survivors, though often accelerated and excited in the early days, had later developed an extreme form of parkinsonism that had slowed or even frozen them, sometimes for decades. A few of the patients at Beth Abraham continued to be accelerated, and one, Ed M., was actually accelerated on one side of his body and slowed on the other.

Dopamine, a neurotransmitter essential for the normal flow of movement and thought, is drastically reduced in ordinary Parkinson's disease, to less than fifteen per cent of normal levels. In postencephalitic parkinsonism, dopamine levels may become almost undetectable. In ordinary Parkinson's disease, in addition to tremor or rigidity, one sees moderate slowings and speedings; in postencephalitic parkinsonism, where the damage in the brain is usually far greater, there may be slowings and speedings to the utmost physiological and mechanical limits of the brain and body.

The very vocabulary of parkinsonism is couched in terms of speed. Neurologists have an array of terms to denote this: if movement is slowed, they talk about "bradykinesia"; if brought to a halt, "akinesia"; if excessively rapid, "tachykinesia." Similarly, one can have bradyphrenia or tachyphrenia—a slowing or accelerating of thought.

In 1969, I was able to start most of these frozen patients on the drug L-DOPA, which had recently been shown to be effective in raising dopamine levels in the brain. At first, this restored a normal speed and freedom of movement to many of the patients. But then, especially in the most severely affected, it pushed them in the opposite direction. One patient, Hester Y., I observed in my journal, showed such acceleration of movement and speech after five days on L-DOPA that "if she had previously resembled a slow-motion film, or a persistent film frame stuck in the projector, she now gave the impression of a speeded-up film, so much so that my colleagues, looking at a film of Mrs. Y. which I took at the time, insisted that the projector was running too fast."

I assumed, at first, that Hester and other patients realized the unusual rates at which they were moving or speaking or thinking but were simply unable to control themselves. I soon found that this was by no means the case. Nor is it the case in patients with ordinary Parkinson's disease, as William Gooddy, a neurologist in England, remarks at the beginning of his book "Time and the Nervous System." An observer may note, he says, how slowed a parkinsonian's movements are, but "the patient will say, 'My own movements . . . seem normal unless I see how long they take by looking at a clock. The clock on the wall of the ward seems to be going exceptionally fast.' "

Gooddy refers here to "personal" time, as contrasted with "clock" time, and the extent to which personal time departs from clock time may become almost unbridgeable with the extreme bradykinesia common in post-encephalitic parkinsonism. I would often see my patient Miron V. sitting in the hallway outside my office. He would appear motionless, with his right arm often lifted, sometimes an inch or two above his knee, sometimes near his face. When I questioned him about these frozen poses, he asked indignantly, "What do you mean, 'frozen poses'? I was just wiping my nose."

I wondered if he was putting me on. One morning, over a period of hours, I took a series of twenty or so photos and stapled them together to make a flick-book, like the ones I used to make to show the unfurling of fiddleheads. With this, I could see that Miron actually *was* wiping his nose but was doing so a thousand times more slowly than normal.

Hester, too, seemed unaware of the degree to which her personal time diverged from clock time. I once asked my students to play ball with her, and they found it impossible to catch her lightning-quick throws. Hester returned the ball so rapidly that their hands, still outstretched from the throw, might be hit smartly by the returning ball. "You see how quick she is," I said. "Don't underestimate her—you'd better be ready." But they could not be ready, since their best reaction times approached a seventh of a second, whereas Hester's was scarcely more than a tenth of a second.

It was only when Miron and Hester were in normal states, neither excessively retarded nor accelerated, that they could judge how startling their speed or slowness had been, and it was sometimes necessary to show them a film or a tape to convince them.

(Disorders of spatial scale are as common in parkinsonism as disorders of time scale. An almost diagnostic sign of parkinsonism is micrographia—minute, and often diminishingly small, handwriting. Typically, patients are not aware of this at the time; it is only later, when they are back in a normal spatial frame of reference, that they are able to judge that their writing was smaller than usual. Thus there may be, for some patients, a compression of space which is comparable to the compression of time. One of my patients, a post-encephalitic woman, used to say, "My space, our space, is nothing like your space.")

With disorders of time scale, there seems almost no limit to the degree of slowing that can occur, and the speeding up of movement sometimes seems constrained only by the physical limits of articulation. If Hester tried to speak or count aloud in one of her very accelerated states, the words or numbers would clash and run into each other. Such physical limitations were less evident with thought and perception. If she was shown a perspective drawing of the Necker cube—an ambiguous drawing which normally seems to switch perspective every few seconds—she might, when slowed, see switches every minute or two (or not at all, if she was "frozen"), but when speeded up she would see the cube "flashing," changing its perspective several times a second.

Striking accelerations may also occur in Tourette's syndrome, a condition characterized by compulsions, tics, and involuntary movements and noises. Some people with Tourette's are able to

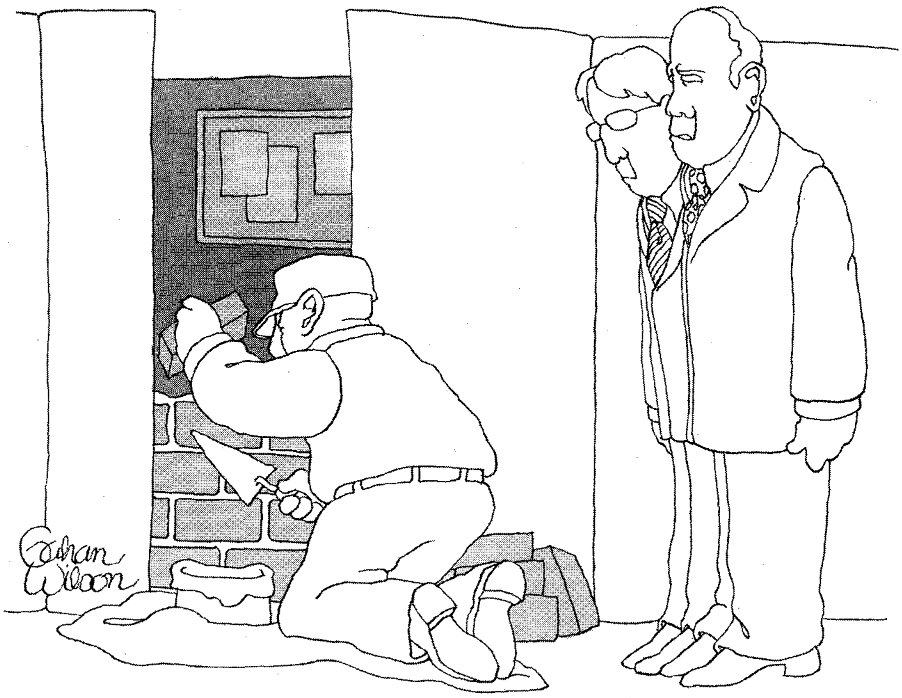
"I love your work."

catch flies on the wing. When I asked one man with Tourette's how he managed this, he said that he had no sense of moving especially fast but, rather, that to him the flies moved slowly.

If one reaches out a hand to touch or grasp something, the normal rate is about one metre per second. Normal experimental subjects, when asked to do this as quickly as possible, reach at about 4.5 metres per second. But when I asked Shane F., an artist with Tourette's, to reach as quickly as he could, he was able to achieve a rate of seven metres per second with ease, without any sacrifice of smoothness or accuracy. When I asked him to stick to normal speeds, his movements became constrained, awkward, inaccurate, and tic-filled.

Another patient with severe Tourette's and very rapid speech told me that, in addition to the tics and vocalizations I could see and hear, there were others of which—with my "slow" eyes and ears—I might be unaware. It was only with videotaping and frame-by-frame analysis that the great range of these "micro-tics" could be seen. In fact, there could be several trains of micro-tics proceeding simultaneously, apparently in complete dissociation from one another, adding up to, perhaps, dozens of micro-tics in a single second. The complexity of all this was as astonishing as its speed, and I thought that one could write an entire book, an atlas of tics, based on a mere five seconds of videotape. Such an atlas, I felt, would provide a sort of microscopy of the brain-mind, for all tics have determinants, whether inner or outer, and every patient's repertoire of tics is unique.

The blurted-out tics that may occur in Tourette's resemble what the great British neurologist John Hughlings Jackson called "emotional" or ejaculate speech (as opposed to complex, syntactically elaborate "propositional" speech). Ejaculate speech is essentially reactive, preconscious, and impulsive; it eludes the monitoring of the frontal lobes, of consciousness, and of ego, and it escapes from the mouth before it can be inhibited.



"Sometimes it's best just to brick them up into their cubicles."

Not just the speed but the quality of movement and thought is altered in tourettism and parkinsonism. The accelerated state tends to be exuberant in invention and fancy, leaping rapidly from one association to the next, carried along by the force of its own impetus. Slowness, in contrast, tends to go with care and caution, a sober and critical stance, which has its uses no less than the "go" of effusion. This was brought out by Ivan Vaughan, a psychologist with Parkinson's disease, who wrote a memoir about his experiences ("Ivan: Living with Parkinson's Disease"; 1986). He sought to do all his writing, he told me, while he was under the influence of L-DOPA, for at such times his imagination and his mental processes seemed to flow more freely and rapidly, and he had rich, unexpected associations of every sort (though if he was too accelerated, this might impair his focus and lead him to tangents in all directions). But, when the effects of L-DOPA wore off, he turned to editing, and would find himself in a perfect state to prune the sometimes too exuberant prose he had written while he was "on."

My tourettic patient Ray, while often beleaguered and bullied by his Tourette's, also managed to exploit it in various ways. The rapidity (and sometimes oddness) of his associations made him quick-witted—he spoke of his "ticcy witticisms" and his "witty ticcicisms," and referred to himself as Witty Ticcy Ray. This quickness and wittiness, when combined with his musical talents, made him a formidable improviser on the drums. He was almost unbeatable at Ping-Pong, partly because of his sheer speed of reaction, and partly because his shots, though not technically illegal, were so unpredictable (even to himself) that his opponents were flummoxed and unable to answer them.

People with extremely severe Tourette's syndrome may be our closest approximation to the sorts of speeded-up beings imagined by Von Baer and James, and people with Tourette's sometimes describe themselves as being "supercharged." "It's like having a five-hundred-horsepower engine under the hood," one of my patients says. Indeed, there are a number of world-class athletes with Tourette's—among them Jim Eisenreich and Mike Johnston, in baseball, Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf, in basketball, and Tim Howard, in soccer.

If the speed of Tourette's can be so adaptive—a neurological gift of sorts—then what is the sense of being relatively sluggish, staid, and "normal"? Why has natural selection not served to increase the number of "speeders" in our midst? The disadvantages of excessive slowness are obvious, but it may be necessary

"Wow—I didn't know you could put that much guilt into one sentence."

• •

(since we sometimes think of speed as unreservedly good) to point out that excessive speed is equally freighted with problems. Tourettic or post-encephalitic speed goes with disinhibition, an impulsiveness and impetuosity that allow "inappropriate" movements and impulses to emerge precipitately. In such conditions, then, dangerous impulses such as putting a finger in a flame or darting in front of traffic, usually inhibited in the rest of us, may be released and acted on before consciousness can intervene.

And, in extreme cases, if the stream of thought is too fast, it may lose itself, break into a torrent of superficial distractions and tangents, dissolve into a brilliant incoherence, a phantasmagoric, almost dreamlike delirium. People with severe Tourette's, like Shane, may find the movements and thoughts and reactions of other people unbearably slow for them, and we "neuro-normals" may at times find the Shanes of this world disconcertingly fast. "Monkeys these people seem to us," James wrote in another context, "whilst we seem to them reptilian."

In the famous chapter in "The Principles of Psychology" on "Will," James speaks of what he calls the "perverse" or pathological will, and of its having two opposite forms: the "explosive" and the "obstructed." He used these terms in relation to psychological dispositions and temperaments, but they seem equally apposite in speaking of such physiological disorders as parkinsonism, Tourette's syndrome, and catatonia. It seems strange that James never speaks of these opposites, the "explosive" and "obstructed" wills, as having, at least sometimes, a relation with each other, for he must have seen people with what we now call manic-depressive or bipolar disorder being thrown, every few weeks or months, from one extreme to the other.

One parkinsonian friend of mine says that being in a slowed state is like being stuck in a vat of peanut butter, while being in an accelerated state is like being on ice, frictionless, slipping down an ever-steeper hill, or on a tiny planet, gravityless, with no force to hold or moor him.

Though such jammed, impacted states would seem to be at the opposite pole from accelerated, explosive ones, patients can move almost instantaneously from one to the other. The term "kinesia paradoxa" was introduced by French neurologists in the nineteen-twenties to describe these remarkable if rare transitions in post-encephalitic patients, who had scarcely moved for years but might suddenly be "released" and move with great energy and force, only to return, after a few minutes, to their previously motionless states. When Hester Y. was put on L-DOPA, such alternations reached an extraordinary degree, and she was apt to make dozens of abrupt reversals a day.

Similar reversals may be seen in patients with extremely severe Tourette's syndrome, who can be brought to an almost stuporous halt by the most minute dose of certain drugs. Even without medication, states of motionless and almost hypnotic concentration tend to occur in Touretters, and these represent the other side, so to speak, of the hyperactive and distractible state.

In catatonia, there may also be dramatic, instantaneous transformations from immobile, stuporous states to wildly active, frenzied ones. The great psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler described this in 1911:

> At times the peace and quiet is broken by the appearance of a catatonic raptus. Suddenly the patient springs up, smashes something, seizes someone with extraordinary power and dexterity. . . . A catatonic arouses himself from his rigidity, runs around the streets in his nightshirt for three hours, and finally falls down and remains lying in a cataleptic state in the gutter. The movements are often executed with great strength, and nearly always involve unnecessary muscle groups. . . . They seem to have lost control of measure and power of their movements.

Catatonia is rarely seen, especially in our present, tranquillized age, but some of the fear and bewilderment inspired by the insane must have come from these sudden, unpredictable transformations.

Catatonia, parkinsonism, and Tourette's, no less than manic depression, may all be thought of as "bipolar" disorders. All of them, to use the nineteenth-century French term, are disorders *à double forme*—Janus-faced disorders, which can switch, incontinently, from one face, one form, to the other. The possibility of any neutral state, any unpolarized state, any "normality," is so reduced in such disorders that we must envisage a dumbbell- or hourglass-shaped "surface" of disease, with only a thin neck or isthmus of neutrality between the two ends.

It is common in neurology to speak of "deficits"—the knocking out of a physiological (and perhaps psychological) function by a lesion, or area of damage, in the brain. Lesions in the cortex tend to produce "simple" deficits, like loss of color vision or the ability to recognize letters or numbers. In contrast, lesions in the regulatory systems of the subcortex—which control movement, tempo, emotion, appetite, level of consciousness, etc.—undermine control and stability, so that patients lose the normal broad base of resilience, the middle ground, and may then be, like puppets, thrown almost helplessly from one extreme to another.

Doris Lessing once wrote of the situation of my post-encephalitic patients, "It makes you aware of what a knife-edge we live on," yet we do not, in health, live on a knife edge but on a broad and stable saddleback of normality. Physiologically, neural normality reflects a balance between excitatory and inhibitory systems in the brain, a balance which, in the absence of drugs or damage, has a remarkable latitude and resilience.

We, as human beings, have relatively constant and characteristic rates of movement, though some people are a bit faster, some a bit slower, and there may be variations in our levels of energy and engagement throughout the day. We are livelier, we move a little faster, we live faster when we are young; we slow down a little, at least in terms of bodily movement and reaction times, as we age. But the range of all these rates, at least in ordinary people, under normal circumstances, is quite limited. There is not that much difference in reaction times between the old and the young, or between the world's best athletes and the least athletic among us. This seems to be the case with basic mental operations, too—the maximum speed at which one can perform serial computations, recognition, visual associations, and so on. The dazzling performances of chess masters, lightning-speed calculators, musical improvisers, and other virtuosos may have less to do with basic neural speed than with the vast range of knowledge, memorized patterns and strategies, and hugely sophisticated skills they can call upon.

And yet there are those who seem to reach almost superhuman speeds of thought. Robert Oppenheimer, famously, when young physicists came to explain their ideas to him, would grasp the gist and implications of their thoughts within seconds, and interrupt them, extend their thoughts, almost as soon as they opened their mouths. Virtually everyone who heard Isaiah Berlin improvise in his torrentially rapid speech, piling image upon image, idea up on idea, building enormous mental structures which evolved and dissolved before one's eyes, felt they were privy to an astonishing mental phenomenon. And this is equally so of a comic genius like Robin Williams, whose explosive, incandescent flights of association and wit seem to take off and hurtle along at rocket-like speeds. Yet here, presumably, one is dealing not with the speeds of individual nerve cells and simple circuits but with neural networks of a much higher order, exceeding the complexity of the largest supercomputer.

Nevertheless, we humans, even the fastest among us, are limited in speed by basic neural determinants, by cells with limited rates of firing, and by limited speeds of conduction between different cells and cell groups. And if, somehow, we could accelerate ourselves a dozen or fifty times we would find ourselves wholly out of synch with the world around us, and in a situation as bizarre as that of the narrator in Wells's story.

But we can make up for the limitations of our bodies, our senses, by using instruments of various kinds. We have unlocked time, as in the seventeenth century we unlocked space, and now have at our disposal what are, in effect, temporal microscopes and temporal telescopes of prodigious power. With these, we can achieve a quadrillion-fold acceleration or retardation, so that we can watch, at leisure, by laser stroboscopy, the femtosecond-quick formation and dissolution of chemical bonds; or observe, contracted to a few minutes through computer simulation, the thirteen-billion-year history of the universe from the big bang to the present, or (at even higher temporal compression) its projected future to the end of time. Through such instrumentalities, we can enhance our perceptions, speed or slow them, in effect, to a degree infinitely beyond what any living process could match. In this way, stuck though we are in our own speed and time, we can, in imagination, enter all speeds, all time. ♦

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING.

FICTION

THE FRACTIOUS SOUTH

BY GINA OCHSNER

As a young boy, I learned many things from many wise people. It was Baba Lyuba, for instance, who told me that if a bird shits on you, that is considered extremely good luck. Before my father left for Afghanistan, he taught me that in the north a falling star was lucky, but in the south—in, say, Stavropol or Nazran—it meant that a bomber had dropped for attack. From Grandpa Ilya I learned that water is life and the quiet fish swimming in it a connection between this world and the next. And, finally, from my mother, who worked in those days as a censor and translator for the Main Administration for Safeguarding State Secrets in the Press, I learned that because we were Jews we were invisible. This, she added, was a common enough ailment for Jews anywhere, east or west. The only people more invisible than Russian Jews, she said, were Gypsies, and Baba Lyuba explained that the Gypsies had learned it from us.

We lived in a town just north of Rostov-on-Don, that great gateway city of the Russian south. The summers were hot. The clouds, heat-frazzled, gave up on rain and drifted empty across the wide sky. There was never enough water to persuade the dust to settle. Standing roadside, I learned to read, by the shape of the dust clouds and how long they hovered, what kind of vehicle was approaching and how fast. A bicycle shot out a thin ribbon of dirt behind its back tire. Smaller cars, like a Niva or a Lada, churned up a loose swath of dirt. Volgas, the sedans popular with the K.G.B., raised the road in a boxlike pattern, each shifting of the gears producing a tighter cloud in its wake. But the KAMAZ and GAZ-66 transport carriers plowed the whole road up into the air, lifting the leaves of the weary aspens and willows and coating them in distinct layers of ashen-colored earth. The GAZ-66s were almost always stuffed with the bodies of dead Russian soldiers. When they passed, we all stood a little way back from the road, out of respect and in recognition of the fact that we did not want anything that had touched a carrier—not even its dust—to touch us. An impossibility on our street, where Mother and Baba swept the dust from one end of the flat to the other, which was how people cleaned in summertime.

JOHN RITTER

I was seven when the trouble in Afghanistan heated up. Father left town in a KAMAZ headed for the Rostov military airfields. Everybody watched the convoy roll by, the rumbling of the engines rattling the fine china in our cupboards.

Mother worked extra hours at the bureau in Rostov, rewriting events so that the human heartache she encountered daily would sound as if it were happening to imaginary people living in far-off places. She hated that job. Truth, she confided to me one day, was a dark stain, and the words of any language were like leaves: one more way to hide ourselves from one another. The truth, she said, was that people born under the Soviet Red Star were doomed to move the earth with their feet, carrying their homeland from place to place. Not so long ago, she reminded me, the Chechens had been moved from the Caucasus to Kazakhstan and the Tatars from the Crimea and the Germans from the Volga. All these people rewriting the roads with the soles of their feet—no wonder everyone looked so tired. "Yes," Mother said, as she laid her cool hand on my forehead, "roads are unlucky." And I knew she was right. After all, a road had taken my father from us.

Baba Lyuba told us that part of being invisible is being quiet, so we didn't complain. Except Grandpa Ilya, who grumbled that all the dust and the noise had completely unnerved the fish.

"They're terrified," he explained one day at the river's edge. I was having my first fishing lesson. I leaned over the water. Down below I could see the fish, dark as stones, eating the shadows of the trees along the bank.

"Yes, fish have feelings, just like you and me. And now they're afraid, even when they pretend they're not." Grandpa wiped his hands on the front of his fishing T-shirt, given to him by a friend from the West: "Smart People Aren't Worth a Shirt," it read, but he had covered the "r" in "shirt" with a piece of white electrical tape. Grandpa could get away with such things: he had fought the Germans in the Great Patriotic War and he had a piece of shrapnel in his hip to prove it. He was also famous for having once sneaked a carp he'd poached past the police station by dressing it in baby clothes and pushing it in a little squeaky-wheeled pram.

That summer, with a handful of worms, Grandpa and I lured the gudgeon that we liked to use for bait into biting. They were good-looking, with their olive flanks paling to yellow and silver, and then deepening again to a dark green—the kind of fish that made me think God must have had a good time when he painted the first of them. But, for all their good looks, God did not give them brains. It took only a few minutes to catch enough of them to start our bid for the bigger fish: pike, chub, barbel, carp, and maybe the mythic speckled trout, a fish we talked about only in low whispers, since no one, not even the veterans who fished the river every day, had ever actually hooked one.

We fished every day that summer and the following summer and the summer after that while we awaited news of my father. And each day Grandpa Ilya taught me something new. It was Grandpa Ilya who showed me that the hook is the backbone to the bait and the connection to the fish. That with a little piece of metal we can be made one. He didn't always know which vowels to write in some words, but that was all right, because he could solve difficult math problems in his head. And he had a finely calibrated sense of proportion that came from his many years of hardship and military service. In spite of all that had been done to him and all that he had done, he did not hate people; he merely hated the things they did. It was Grandpa who told me that nothing in life could be so bad that fishing wouldn't make it better, or, if not better, then bearable, or, if not that, then at least it was a way to pass the time while you waited for your luck to change.

Over the course of the next ten years, the River Don rose and fell, rose and fell, like a body breathing. In winter, the waters shrank. Then, if we used balls of pork lard—which was unkosher but necessary to hook the more discriminating fish—we might catch enough perch and carp to feed us for several weeks. In summer, the river swelled and the pike flopped about in the reeds. Whatever the season, we began with the same rituals—me asking Grandpa if we were allowed to fish at whichever spot he'd chosen and Grandpa wiggling a finger in his ear: "What? What is that funny noise I hear? Such questions!" And as long as the fish had a sporting chance—that is, as long as they were in water—any manner or method of catching them was O.K. We fished, and over the course of that decade of watching the water move away from us and reshape its banks with each season we learned to stop waiting for my father.

As time passed, Grandpa got older and a little deafer. Mother learned a few more languages and took a job with *Red Star*, the military newspaper. Baba wore filmy nightgowns over her housedress, and I married the first girl who didn't say no. Me, with my eyes set a little too close together for anyone's comfort, and Voya, with her furry eyebrows and jagged teeth—we were a perfect match. We even had passion. I for the fish and she for American cosmetics, but when she was ovulating, bless her, she also had some passion for me.

We just had time for a quick wedding before I was called up into the Russian Army. There was trouble in the fractious south, once again in Chechnya, and so off went all the young men of our town: Oleg from two floors down; Good Nikolai, the kid I used to pick on, and Bad Nikolai, the kid who picked on me; and Boris, a troubled-genius type who had mapped out entire lexicons and systems of thought and had chess champion written all over him. As our sweethearts and mothers waved from the windows, we stirred up a small city of dust in our convoy headed to Mozdok, where we would operate tanks and learn the basics of bomb detonation.

When I returned home two years later, nothing was right. Grandpa Ilya spent his days sitting on a metal bench in our apartment building's dusty courtyard. Instead of rigging a fishing rod, he sat tying flies that he had no intention of using. "The fish can't even swim straight anymore," he explained.

"It's on account of those biological chemicals they're using in the south," Vitaly Vitaliev, the self-appointed superintendent of our building, who was famous for his mouth full of gold-capped teeth, piped up. "Ever seen a fish swim sideways?"

As if that weren't bad enough, I started hearing things. Ever since Oleg from two floors down stepped on a mine and got himself blown to bits, everywhere I went and in everything I did I heard the sound of ticking. When I rode my bike to the river, I heard *tick tick tick*. Pedalling over the verge of dry grass that followed the road: *tick tick tick*. Climbing the steps to the apartment: *tick tick tick*. It haunted me, this sound.

"Idiot," Voya said, on non-baby-making days.

"Stupid!" Tinke, our upstairs neighbor, tapped in code with her wrench on the water pipes. "You are hearing the sprockets on your bike." But I knew what I heard. On this morning, as I stood on the wet banks of the river, it was Voya, resplendent with anger, her hair freshly dyed and dripping fiery orange down her neck.

"Misha!" she shouted. Her voice scattered the swifts in the lime trees, and I imagined that the fish that had been waiting patiently also scattered. Which was O.K. I couldn't even hold the rod steady anymore and I hadn't actually seen a fish in weeks: not the chubs with the metallic-blue scales, or the whiskered barbels, or even the greedy pike that liked to navigate the reeds for overfed and unwary ducks.

Voya perched on the muddy bank and tried hard to look *kulturny* in her new shoes—very chic, very pointed, with mean-spirited stiletto heels. "If you can get up so early, then why can't you get a job?" It was a perfectly reasonable question.

I shrugged, a hapless signature move, which always drove Voya nuts. I knew that she wanted evidence of some ambition on my part.

"Well, what do you do with yourself all day long?" Voya had her hands on her hips.

"Fish," I said. Before I even had time to duck, one of those prestigious shoes sliced through the air and clipped me on the back of the head. And then off she limped, *squish squish*, through the mud. Every other step was murder for some unlucky worm, but a worm, unlike a man, can be broken in half and still survive.

Since I'd come back and devoted myself to a life of contemplative fishing, choosing forgetfulness as a path to healing, all Voya and I could do was fight. And drink. And fight some more. Most nights, her anger burned its way through the courtyard, up the urine-scented stairs, and along the corridors of the massive concrete apartment structure. Pockmarks in the walls spoke of her many attempts to impale me with her shoes. It was a woman's way, Vitaly sometimes tried to console me, to express love as hatred and vice versa.

"She wouldn't keep trying to kill you if she didn't really care," Vitaly said one afternoon, his gold-plated incisors gleaming. He handed me a bottle of Crobar. "Now drink—down to the bottom!" he commanded. I took the bottle and handed over two of the three perch I'd brought back from the river—his portion for being so well informed about so many things, like where and to whom to sell my fish, a deficit food item, and how much to ask per kilo.

It was early evening by the time we'd killed his bottle. Since they don't manufacture Crobar bottles with resealable caps, it was our moral obligation not to leave the job unfinished, Vitaly once told me. I was inclined to believe him; having been in the secret police years earlier, he knew things that the rest of us didn't know or didn't want to know. But Mother had informed me long ago that Vitaly had Gypsy blood, and was thus given to fanciful pranks and stories. He had a bad habit, she said, of grasping at knowledge that outstripped his comprehension. I knew my mother was right about the Gypsy part. When Vitaly heard about Oleg being blown to bits, the first thing he did was go into the courtyard. There he pressed stones in the form of a cross until they were level with the mud, the idea being that the earth always takes back its own. Vitaly did other Gypsy things, such as cooking porcupines in clay. And when he couldn't find porcupines he cooked rats, which, frankly, are just porcupines that have lost their spines and thus their sense of self-worth. Vitaly liked to drink, and preferred to view life from the bottom of a vodka bottle—that was the best thing about him—and most days I even liked him, told myself that he was like a father or an older, more calculating version of me. Thinking this way helped me overlook his completely threadbare moral development.

As evening tipped into night, the moon roiled about as if cast on a fishing line. From his waistband, Vitaly withdrew a second bottle of vodka. Though I already had an infant hangover threatening to cut its teeth, I kept drinking. It is, after all, considered good luck to cure a hangover by pouring more booze on top of it.

"Ach, you bitch!" Vitaly shouted. Though he held the bottle at arm's length, the gesture signalled affection. "Speaking of dogs . . ." He pointed to an old edition of *Izvestiya*, scattered at the bottom of the stairs. "Those Chechens—who do they think they are? Savages—they deserve what's coming to them!"

I winced and wagged my head from side to side, like a weary metronome. I'd seen a lot of bad things happen to people I knew. Oleg, of course, irretrievable. And Boris, the troubled genius, whose dark hair had, in the course of a single maneuver, turned chalk white. If his Army-issue assault weapon had spilled innocent blood, then why not the guilty, he asked. And the next day, with a coat hanger rigged to the trigger, he shot himself. Good Nikolai and Bad Nikolai: both of them dead. Their bodies torched, their eyes open to see it. Yes, bad things happen. And nobody knows it better than those of us who come home.

"You should go back and kick their asses, boy-o." Vitaly gave me the bottle. "You should do it for Mother Russia."

"It's something to think about," I said.

Vitaly smiled and a gold tooth winked. He rubbed his hand on my head, the Gypsy reminder to stop thinking.

By the time we finished the bottle, light had seeped over the hills, turning the clouds the texture of curdled milk. The hammers inside my head had quieted to a bearable rhythm, but I could hear Baba Lyuba and Tinke upstairs arguing, again. I trudged past Vitaly and up to the third-story landing. Mother was scurrying around, darting into the open flat, then rushing out again. First looking for her coat. Then for her hat.

"What is going on?" Grandpa Ilya's voice followed her.

"Nothing important," Mother said, rushing back in for her purse.

"What, then?" came Baba Lyuba's voice.

On the landing, Mother brushed a kiss on each of my cheeks, then tipped her chin toward Baba. "Yeltsin is having trouble with his heart again," she said, and disappeared down the stairs. Before the outer door had even fallen back into the locks, Baba was wailing. I thought she'd gone barking mad. Who could weep for a man like that? But then, as the bent rims of worry turned around and around, I realized that Mother had been speaking in military euphemisms again. Yeltsin's heart trouble meant another major operation in Chechnya, and she had to make it sound good before the next day's papers hit the stands.

"Mi-sha!" Voya's alto voice broke in half, summoning in an instant the hangover hammers. Then she appeared on the landing. She glared at me and brushed a brittle strand of hair behind an ear. She'd dyed it again, this time the color of cadmium rage. "I can't live like this forever," she said.

"How else should we live?" I asked, ducking into the apartment.

"Better. We should live better, and we should have things."

"What things?"

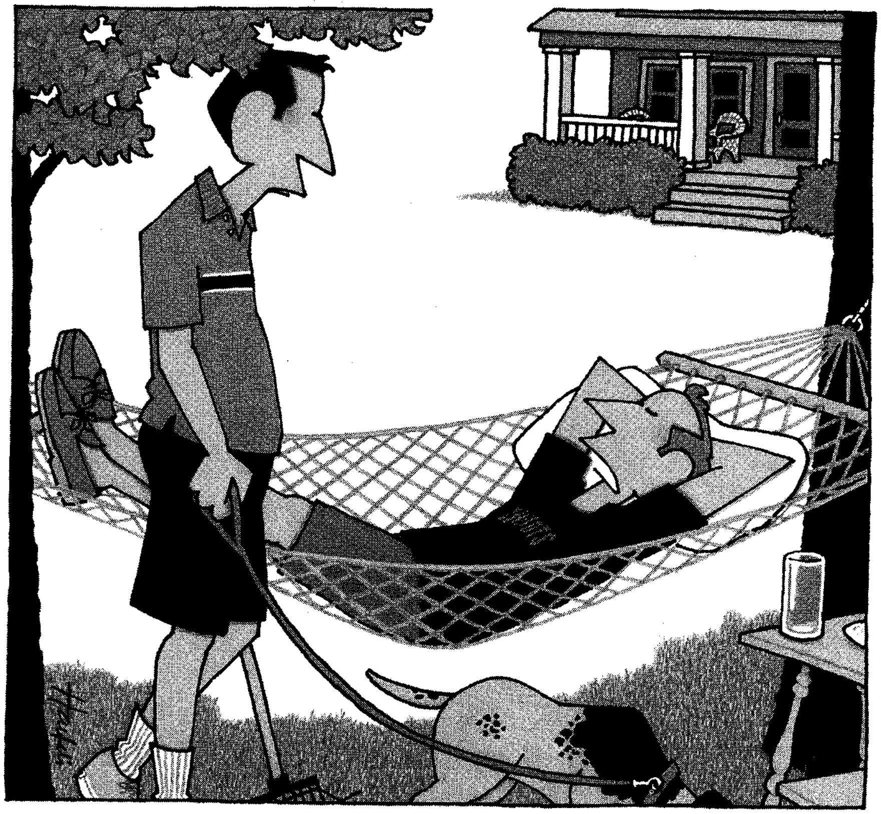
"Things. An apartment to ourselves." Voya waved her thermometer at me. "Babies."

Such impossible desires, especially since we had all the typical post-Soviet problems—that is, we were in possession of some brains and absolutely no clout or money. In the same boat were my mother and Grandpa Ilya and Baba Lyuba. Which was why we all lived together in the first place, our sleeping areas cordoned off with a complicated network of towels hung as curtains from clotheslines.

"Don't *you* want things?" The bottom dropped out of Voya's voice.

Baba Lyuba looked at me, clicked her tongue in disappointment, and turned back to the TV, winking and blinking there on the reinforced cardboard box it came in.

On the screen was an old broadcast of Yeltsin addressing a crowd. Even though he had a way of thrusting his neck out in order to hide his double chin and make his jaw appear stronger, he didn't look good on camera. There were big problems in the south, Yeltsin said, but all I heard was the old Soviet slogan: "With an iron hand, we will drive humanity to happiness!" He raised a fist, and the people, hearing strong words that suggested purpose, words we all like to hear sometimes, clapped and shouted. In the corner of the screen, a clock kept time, the second hand ticking loudly, as if to remind us all to keep breathing.



"I'm catching up on my inertia."

STAFF PICKS
Rx
PRESCRIPTIONS
SIPRESS

"Do you hear that?" I turned to Baba Lyuba.

"What?" She sniffed the air.

"What?" Grandpa Ilya shouted.

With her wrench, Tinke from upstairs tapped out in code: What? What?

"That ticking!" I cried.

Responding to some ancient cue, Baba Lyuba jumped up and ran around the room opening and shutting doors, peering into the cuffs of sleeves, both her own and those of others. Old habits die hard, and Baba was, if anything, a creature of habit. But she could assemble a Kalashnikov in less than fifteen seconds, so if she wanted to wear flimsy lingerie and shout, I say, do what makes the most noise and be happy.

Then, from behind our layer of privacy towels, came Voya's voice, strangely modulated to something like tenderness: "*Mi*-sha! Come here!"

I stepped behind the curtain. Voya slid her nylons to her shins and I studied her thighs and the sliver of light that shone between them. She waved the thermometer at me. Ah. A baby-making moment.

Good taste and good sense impose certain limits, but never in my life have I been accused of possessing either. And it's hard to say no to Voya. Off came the pants. Then, in labored silence, Voya and I set about doing what a man and a woman must do. Baba coughed and dragged the kettle over the burner, doing everything she could to convince herself that she wasn't hearing what she knew she was hearing, while Tinke kept clanking on the pipes. Add to this the noise of Vitaly playing sentimental songs on a paper and comb, exploring the metaphysical riffs and eddies of life as clarified by the fumes of his rapidly emptying vodka bottle: "Which proves that creation began on a Tuesday, which is all the more reason to drink on a Monday." Vitaly's wisdom drifted up through our open window. Through all of this, I could sense more than see Grandpa Ilya in his chair looking at his Western fly-tying manual, recalling, I suppose, all the fish that had got away.

The baby-making rendezvous over, Voya rolled out from under me and took her temperature again. A golden moment, because it is nearly impossible to utter demeaning observations with a thermometer in your mouth. But then out came the thermometer, and it was all systems go.

"This business in Chechnya. Vitaly says it'll be over before it even really starts."

"I don't know." I wagged my head, remembering what I'd seen before. "The Chechens can knock out tanks as well as anybody else," I said.

"It's a job. It's good money."

"Maybe." I shrugged. "I don't know."

"You don't know much, do you?" Voya said, more amazed now than angry.

I thought of Boris and dropped my head to my hands. "Sometimes it's better to be a happy idiot," I groaned.

"Well, good news. You're halfway there." Voya pulled on her nylons. "I suppose you'll go fishing now."

Mention an itch, and a scratch is sure to follow. I grabbed my net and rod and flew down the stairs.

Vitaly met me at the bottom. He had another issue of *Izvestiya* in his hand, the paper rolled up tight. "Boy-o." He draped an arm over my shoulder. "I like you. You're not too bright, but you try hard. That's why I'm telling you something I haven't told any of the other guys."

"What?"

Vitaly laid a finger alongside his nose. "Things."

"What things?" At the open window above us, Baba's head appeared between pots sprouting little yellow stars, the flowers of future tomatoes.

"Things," Vitaly said, steering me closer to the building. "For instance, if you were to go back and participate in a military operation, you'd receive five million rubles."

"Five million!" I heard Baba yell up to Tinke.

"If the operation was successful, three million more. For the knocking out of a tank or an armored vehicle, an additional three million. The destruction of a self-propelled artillery gun would get five million." Vitaly stopped to catch his breath.

From our window, I could hear Voya on the phone with a girlfriend: "Does it have a real oven—the kind you bake things in?" Her voice cartwheeled up the octaves. Yes, she wanted things.

Then came Mother through the courtyard, back already from the bureau, in her hands the latest edition of *Red Star*.

"What happens if I die?" I whispered.

Vitaly could hardly contain himself. "Then your family would be paid a hundred and thirty million rubles. Think of it! Brilliant and so simple. Only a real idiot could screw this up."

"But I was just a foot soldier."

"Pah." Vitaly waved a hand at a mosquito. "I can fix it so that you were and still are élite Kantemirov 4th Tank Division."

But Mother, who knew more about it than Vitaly ever could, shook her head sadly. "Don't listen to him," she said, so quietly that it could have been another mosquito buzzing by my ear.

Vitaly stuffed his hands in his pockets and considered the possibilities. "Yes, I can fix it. For half your pay, I'll fix it. It's so simple, really."

I looked at my rod and net. I thought of the logic of water. How it is necessary sometimes for one creature to trade its life for another. The worm for the chop, the caddis for the trout.

"Do it for God!" Vitaly said. "Or do it for your family," he added gently. Then he lifted his gaze to Grandpa Ilya, wedged next to Baba and peering down at us from the tomato pots. "Do it for all those Chechen fish. In the mountain lakes they have fish the size of big dogs."

Down the street, a convoy of GAZ-66s moaned. The spell broken, Mother moved past me, her head down.

Yes, the Chechen trout are legendary. In the high lakes of the Sunzha region lives the Pacha-chaar, the kingfish. Mother told me that when Tsar Alexander II first ate this trout, he developed such a taste for it that he immediately had them railed in to St. Petersburg in cars equipped with oversize aquariums. Ever since, anglers have been relentless in their pursuit of the Pacha-chaar, that trout with the golden scales and the regal mouth. This fish knows the number of days a man has left to live, and if you hook it, it must tell you your fate.

I counted the steps up to the landing. Mother was waiting outside our flat. She kept her head down and the newspaper clutched to her chest. But, over the top of her glasses, she fixed her eyes on mine. "He's dangerous, you know. His ideas are like his vodka—cheap and intoxicating," she said, pushing open the door.

Later, at the cardboard table, Mother spread out an old edition of *Red Star* while Baba and Voya poured tea and put out white bread and a small bowl of dark cherries. We all ate and drank in silence. Grandpa Ilya finished tying a dark cahill fly, the ginger hackles fluttering seductively with every movement of the air. Voya checked her reflection in the belly of the silver coffeepot, so tarnished that it had a purple sheen the color of a pike's flanks. Her eyebrows had thinned a bit, and I knew that, despite her rage, she really was worried.

Baba spilled some tea on the newspaper and leaned to examine the damage. The red star had smeared, the ink staining the table underneath. "Oh, if only you-know-who were still alive," she said, touching the wet star. "Yes, things would be better. He was a true hero."

Mother jumped from her chair, her hand raised, as if she were going to strike Baba. "How can you say that after what he did to the Jews!"

Baba levelled her gaze at Mother. "Stalin won the war. And there was bread in the shops. Every day," Baba said, poking at the bread on her plate. "And I don't mean this stuff here."

Grandpa pinched the cahill fly between his thumb and forefinger and held it up. "Listen to us!" He spoke to the fly. "If God is home and goodness the land we are searching for, then we are in a far country," he said, dropping the fly.

"Yes," Baba said, hanging her head, "but it is still our country."

Mother carried her teacup to the sink, the cup trembling in the saucer. Voya popped the last cherry into her mouth, hooked an arm through mine, and led me to our sanctuary behind the towels.

"Your grandmother!" Voya rolled the cherry from one side of her mouth to the other.

I shook my head. "The thing to remember about Baba is that she honestly thinks the dead come back to see who's wearing their shoes and to reclaim beloved handbags."

"Still, she has a point. War is good business. Especially if you win." The stone of the cherry knocked between Voya's teeth.

"Yes, but the Chechens—they are people just like us. If they want their own patch of dirt, some rocks, why not let them have it?"

"So stay, if you want. I don't care!" Voya said at last, spitting out the stone. It flew through the air and stuck to my shirt. "Just do something besides fish!"

I reached for her shoulder, and she sank to the mattress and began to weep, her sobbing grand and troubled and mysterious all at the same time. I held Voya—or, rather, she allowed me to hold her—and eventually she wiped her nose on my shirt.

"Oh, Misha, you are like a child," she said, her chin wobbling. "I can't be angry with a child." Voya stuck her thermometer into her mouth, and I counted the seconds. Then she yanked the instrument out, frowning. "No," she waved the thermometer in the air. "And not right here, either." Then she pulled the bedsheet up over her head and fell fast asleep.

They say that we dream at night of what we want by day but don't have the words for. In the daytime, we are poor, our words flimsy, but nighttime makes us rich, the images of the big and small things we desire swirling about as if they were ours already. As I slept, pictures trotted across my eyelids, and I dreamed of Voya besieged by an army of toasters. I saw Baba Lyuba and fourth-story Tinke, reconciled at last, floating downriver in a washtub, Baba steering with her mop. For Grandpa Ilya, I dreamed of a complicated three-tiered tackle box complete with chenille, peacock burls, long ring-necked rooster hurls, lead wire, and the lemon-colored side feathers of a duck—everything he would need to make flies that would fool even the most discerning of fish. For Mother, who wanted to live only on the bread of faithful speech, I dreamed of newspapers with blank pages.

For myself, I dreamed of the silent wrasse with a bolt of iridescent silver scales and mandarin-orange flames running along its flanks. I dreamed of weed beds full of pike and reeds of perch, the black-tailed dace and the mythic taimen of the Siberian rivers, and all the fish quietly sleeping on the other side of the world.

A dog barked. Voya stirred and muttered, "Idiot!" Even in sleep, she was angry, her eyebrows stitched together. I pulled on my boots, crept through the flat and down the corridor, and tiptoed past Vitaly, snoring in the stairwell.

The air was heavy, splitting at the seams. It was one of those foggy melting mornings, good for tossing coins and not looking where they fall. I got my bike and headed for the river and imagined, as I pedalled, and it squeaked and ticked, that it was singing sad songs, saying with its groans all that I wished I could say and never would.

When I reached the river, the veterans had already stretched their nets over the best spots. Upriver, the young boys, on summer holiday and bored, acted out the Book of Revelation. They threw rocks at each other and mimicked the various plagues described in that terrible book. Two boys tortured a hapless frog. Two others pretended that the river had turned to blood. And, because I had a patchy beard and close-set eyes, they called me Jesus. As I pedalled by one of the boys, a stone whizzed past my ear.

"You're dead!" the boy shrieked. I stopped my bike and turned to him. It was Oleg's little brother, Yuri. "I lobbed a grenade at you and you're dead!" Yuri jabbed the air between us with a stick. I kept pedalling, and my bike kept ticking, all the way downriver to the place where the rocks broke the current. The water smelled like metal and the air smelled like earth. I planted my feet in the dirt, my body hollow and aching, but my hand steadier than it had been in months. Then I cast my line, cutting into the water like a razor.

I stood like that for hours, watching the sun slide through the sky. I was thinking about the fish, how they live their whole lives fighting water. They charge against the current, pushing for spawning waters. And then I felt a tug. I tightened my grip on the pole and hauled the line in. A speckled trout! How it had escaped the nets of the veterans I couldn't even guess.

We fought for a while, me hauling the line, the fish trying to slough off the hook. At last, I worked the trout to the shallows. As I lifted it from the water and onto solid ground, it whipped its body around, thrashing against the hard-packed earth, croaking and whistling, angry to have been landed. Some people may not think much of the speckled trout, but on the bank, as it gasped and fought for air, the light caught its orange fins and red flanks and I saw for myself how beautiful a fish it was. I wanted to touch its heaving sides, make sure its scales weren't actually gutter-shot gold. So pure and brave a fish—I was almost sorry to see it come to this.

Then I stabbed it and cleaned it quickly. I killed it because that's what I had been taught to do and I was taught that we were not bad people for doing this. I thought of Good Nikolai and Bad Nikolai, of Boris. After all, even the beautiful and strong sometimes pay with their lives. And where only moments earlier I had stood in amazement before this fish, with its strong body and its powerful fins suggesting flight, I now stood saddened to have been the reason for its demise.

I bent and washed my hands in the river. Then I stepped out of the water, slid the trout inside my shirt, its slick skin against mine, and pedalled away. The whole way home I felt as if I had swallowed a sharp river reed and it had lodged inside my chest. When I opened my mouth for air, a hollow sound came whistling out of my throat. And inside my head that old ticking marked the retreat of the clouds and their slow cooling from the colors of fire to the colors of dusk: from pink to purple, to the hue of a bluing plate along a rifle, and then to ash.

By the time I'd made it to our courtyard, the moon was tethered to the hills, a full, concrete moon, the kind that turns men into animals, causes dogs to bark and married couples to fight.

When Vitaly saw me, he peeled himself from the stone archway. A cloud of mosquitoes followed him, a buzzing halo about his head and ears. He stopped, brought a flask to his mouth. I watched the bobbing of his Adam's apple. Up, down. Up, down.

"Good news, boy-o! I've arranged everything!" Vitaly shouted once he'd finished drinking. As he approached, the mosquitoes wobbled away, dizzy. Somehow he looked longer of tooth. From his pocket he withdrew a shot glass. A real drinking glass! He handed me his flask. I could smell the watered-down rocket fuel inside. "Pour!" he ordered, and it struck me, as I carefully rimmed the glass, how amazingly wolflike Vitaly had become in the light of this moon.

"So. You're going. Next week. Drink!"

I drank.

"Yes, you'll go and have a wonderful time. Go down there and show them who's boss. You'll feel a thousand times better. And, finally, you'll get the respect you deserve."

"No," I shook my head. "I don't think so."

From the fourth-floor window, Tinke's head emerged, and at our window were Baba and Voya, their hair dyed in companion shades of purple.

"Yes, you'll go and be a thousand times richer," Vitaly said.

I thought of the fish in my shirt, of all the fish I wanted to catch, how along their scales entire decades can flit from shimmer to shadow. "No. I'm not going."

Vitaly blinked, as if in the presence of an unexpected joke. Then he smashed his glass against the stone bench. "You coward! You dirty coward!" he bellowed, his fury absolute. Then he lowered his head and charged. He hit me, hard, in the stomach, and I fell against the stairs. My beautiful speckled trout slipped to the ground.

I looked at the fallen fish and felt within me such a mixture of rage and sorrow and lunacy that I almost understood why men kill each other. I reached for my trout and Vitaly lunged again. At that moment, a tomato pot whizzed from high above and clipped him on the shoulder. He staggered and collapsed against the bench. It was a long and thick silence that lay there between us. And then Vitaly grinned.

"Now, *that's* true love," he said, fanning the air about his face with one hand and pointing to our tomato pot with the other. I looked at the plant, the scattered dirt, the shards of the pot. Somewhere underneath all the mess was my speckled trout, pulverized.

Vitaly took a liberal drink from his flask, then pointed his nose toward the moon and howled.

I trudged up the stairs to our flat. Voya met me at the door, took my hand, and led me to our sagging mattress. We sat in silence, listening to Vitaly and to the sounds coming from the road: even at this late hour, the KAMAZ trucks rattled and whined as they headed south for

Mozdok. I thought of how history repeats itself in such sounds, in the growls of tanks and the booms of supersonic jets. How entire centuries are recalled in the return of the same weary dust.

I looked at Voya. Her violet hair hung in her face. "Who were you aiming for—me or Vitaly?" I asked her.

Voya ran her hands over her dress, smoothing the fabric with her fingers.

"You're right," I said. "It doesn't really matter."

"Tell me things will change," she said. Her voice sounded irremediably sad. It was as if she had swallowed the same reed as I had, and it had changed the texture of her words from anger to a great and jagged sorrow. Through the veil of her hair I could see her mascara running.

"Things will change," I said, but I could hear how empty my words sounded against the rumblings of the convoy outside the window.

Baba drifted to and from the windows, conferring with Tinke about Vitaly below.

"Well," Tinke called, "he always was an exhibitionist."

"He'll probably take off his shirt," Baba said.

"Or worse, recite a poem," Grandpa Ilya shouted.

Mother laughed, and it was such a sweet sound, like water. I thought that, in all this madness, such a sound might save us.

"Come closer," Voya said, unbuttoning my shirt. The concrete moon threw a wash of silver over our mattress. Voya kicked her stockpile of shoes into the corner and pulled her dress over her head, the light of the moon illuminating her neck and shoulders and her very *kulturny* Western brassiere. Ah, the concrete moon! It was, after all, the kind of moon that made crows fly backward and wheatgrass volunteer beside the road. A moon that asked the dust to settle, winked at stolen kisses, and caused the early stars to bloom in the sky and tomatoes to ripen on the vine. Voya kissed me then. Such kisses! With the first kiss, I was transported to the days before I knew what a war was. With the second, I was returned to the red passion of our youth, and with the third to renewal, to being brought back from the dead, remade from mud. ♦

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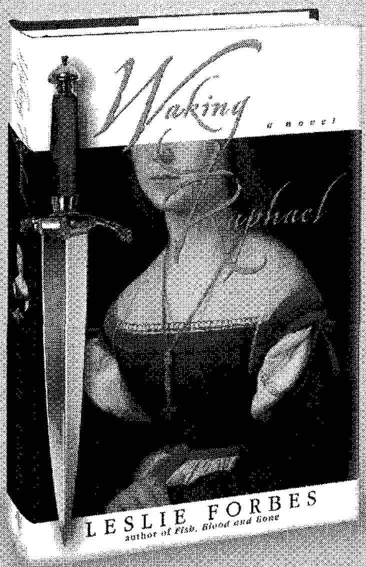

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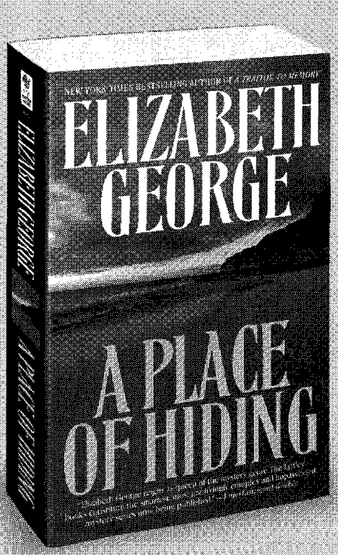

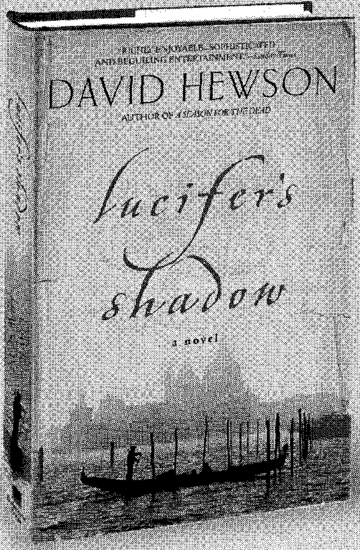

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THE CRITICS

A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE BIG ONE

Historians rethink the war to end all wars.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

The last century, through its great cataclysms, offers two clear, ringing, and, unfortunately, contradictory lessons. The First World War teaches that territorial compromise is better than full-scale war, that an "honor-bound" allegiance of the great powers to small nations is a recipe for mass killing, and that it is crazy to let the blind mechanism of armies and alliances trump common sense. The Second teaches that searching for an accommodation with tyranny by selling out small nations only encourages the tyrant, that refusing to fight now leads to a worse fight later on, and that only the steadfast rejection of compromise can prevent the natural tendency to rush to a bad peace with worse men. The First teaches us never to rush into a fight, the Second never to back down from a bully.

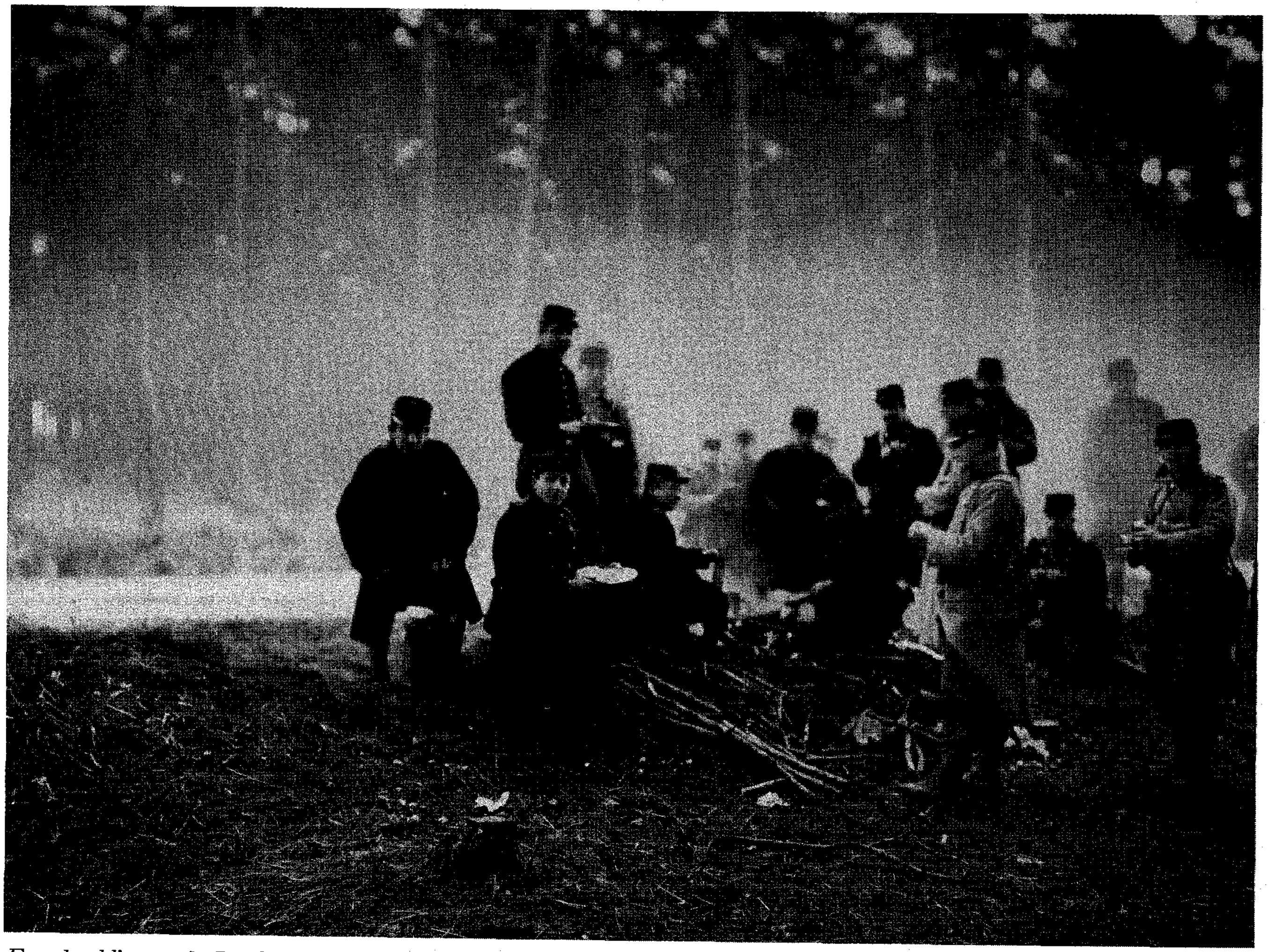
These two lessons are taught less as morals than as collective memory: the lore of the Second World War remains on the whole heroic, while the imagery of the First, which was fought by the same armies and even, on occasion, the same men, remains that of utter waste. (Compare Steven Spielberg's "Saving Private Ryan" and Peter Weir's "Gallipoli," both accounts of Churchillian invasions.) Every time a Western politician with any historical sense faces a crisis, he has to decide whether he should back down and search for whatever compromise he can find, for fear of repeating 1914, or step up and slug somebody, for fear of repeating 1939. John Kennedy, at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, had Barbara Tuchman's "The Guns of August" as a warning at his bedside, but he also had his generals around him muttering about Munich.

Yet, with the coming of the new century, and the ninetieth anniversary of the beginning of the Great War, it seems, at last, a thing that took place long ago. While waves of revisionism and refinement have come and gone, something larger is at work now, and that is a tendency to view the war not as the end of everything but as just one more thing that happened. This publishing season brings us an exceptional round of new books on the subject, and it is possible to scent the first cool injections of historical embalming fluid at the edges of their pages. David Fromkin's "Europe's Last Summer" (Knopf; $26.95) offers revisionism of a kind already familiar to academic historians, placing the blame for the war not only on the international system but, especially, on a couple of nasty German soldier-statesmen. David Stevenson's "Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy" (Basic; $35), perhaps the best comprehensive one-volume history of the war yet written, implicates the politicians on all sides, who started it and kept it going. There are also more specialized works, most notably "The Kaiser's Army" (Oxford; $40), by Eric Dorn Brose, which sharply quizzes the idea of a monolithic German militarism of the sort that Fromkin proposes.

But the season, and the war, belongs to Hew Strachan, a professor at All Souls College, Oxford, who has published three books on the Great War in the past four years. Strachan is preparing a definitive, three-volume history of the war, and, though only the first volume, "The First World War: To Arms" (Oxford; $24.95), has been completed, he has now condensed his research into a single-volume history, "The First World War" (Viking; $27.95)—thereby giving us, with a slightly Borgesian note, the popular synopsis of a trilogy of books that does not, as yet, actually exist.

What Strachan offers is history as only the professionals can do it, and rarely enough even then. Every intricacy, political, military, and diplomatic, of the conflict is open for inspection: if you are curious about, say, the failed German effort to subvert British India by way of hidden subsidies to a small San Francisco-based Indian-nationalist movement, this is the place to find out about it. But Strachan is no drudge; he has a point to make and a message to deliver. His desire is to take the cliché image of the war, particularly the English one—the war as Monty Python massacre, with idiot Graham Chapman generals sending gormless Michael Palin soldiers to a senseless death—and replace it with something more like the image that Americans have of our Civil War: a horrible, hard slog, certainly, but fought that way because no other was available, and fought for a cause in itself essentially good.

This is a challenge to conventional thinking about the Great War which cannot be circumscribed by the usual left-right, hard-soft categories. The last military history of comparable intelligence and ambition, after all, came, only five years ago, from the matchlessly vivid pen of John Keegan, who, with remarkable ferocity, drew an opposite lesson. Keegan, a man of the right not readily critical of military men or methods, began his 1999 history, "The First World War" (Knopf; $35), with the declaration that the war was "a tragic and unnecessary conflict" that "destroyed the benevolent and optimistic culture of the European continent"—a meaningless disaster, from which all the subsequent disasters of the century descend. The recent reading list is also haunted by the conservative Niall Ferguson's fine, aggressively revisionist history “The Pity of War,” which grieves over the war less as a disaster of imperialism than as a disaster *for* imperialism. The war, for Ferguson, was a catastrophe because overrating the German threat prevented British imperialism from proceeding on its essentially benevolent and necessary worldwide mission. It was the wrong war fought in the wrong place for the wrong reasons in the wrong way: not the Civil War plus mustard gas but Vietnam to the power of ten.



French soldiers at the Battle of the Marne, in 1915. In three years, more than three million men lost their lives on the Western Front.

CINÉMATHÈQUE ROBERT-LYNEN DE LA VILLE DE PARIS

All these historians find themselves contending with the issues of historical judgment: how much can you blame the people of the past for getting something wrong when they could not have known it was going to go so wrong? The question is what they knew, when they knew it, if there was any way for them to know more, given what anyone knew at the time, and how in God’s name we could ever know enough about our own time not to do the same thing all over again. Or, to put it another way, *are* there lessons in history, or just stories, mostly sad?

The origins of the war, which, in six weeks of the summer of 1914, took Europe from a long peace to mutual massacre, are exhausting to read about, in part because there is no real protagonist. There is no Lincoln or Napoleon, no Bismarck or Hitler. As happens in car wrecks, every actor reacts, and even those who are most at fault seem to be bystanders at the general catastrophe. The familiar facts remain largely unchallenged: a Bosnian Serb terrorist named Gavrilo Princip, probably with the help of some elements in the Serbian government, organized an assassination attempt against the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife when they were on an official visit to Sarajevo, the capital of the recently annexed Austro-Hungarian dependency of Bosnia, on June 28, 1914. Princip, a poet and spasmodic nationalist, memorably described by A. J. P. Taylor as a character out of Chekhov who unfortunately knew how to shoot, saw the “morning” plot, which involved a bowling-ball bomb-throwing right out of a Mack Sennett comedy, fail. He was standing around in a desultory state of disappointment later that afternoon when the Archduke’s car, in a horrible piece of fortuity, turned the corner directly in front of him.

The deaths were notably unmourned; Ferdinand, a difficult and unpopular figure, was no J.F.K. The only important personage who seemed really offended was Kaiser Wilhelm, of Germany, who had a class interest in protecting Germanic royalty from Slavic terrorists. Nonetheless, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy recognized that something had to be done, and decided to go after the Serbians, hard; the Germans, allies of long standing, offered to hold the Austrians’ coat while they did it. In mid-July, the Austrian government drew up an ultimatum, most of whose terms the Serbians accepted. But the

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document was never seriously intended to be more than a preliminary to invasion. The Russians, who had recently rebuilt their Army, announced that they would defend their fellow-Slavs, and the French, who not long before had entered into an alliance with the Russians, felt compelled to mobilize, too.

As late as August 2nd, the British, though allied with France, were disinclined to take part in a continental war. But then it became plain that a German military response to France would violate the neutrality of Belgium, which had been guaranteed by the British, among others, in a nearly century-old treaty. Practically within a single day, the soft humanitarians and the hard imperialists within the British government found a common cause; the country reversed course, warned the Germans off, and went to war. In the first week of June, all of Europe was in a state of peace and prosperity that seemed likely to last forever; by the first week of August, the carnage had begun.

Two kinds of "inevitablism" have long held sway as explanations for the deeper sources of the catastrophe. One, made famous by Lenin, and still cited by some historians on the left, is that the war was the certain consequence of imperial overstretch and colonial rivalry: Germany's *Weltpolitik*, its "world-policy," put it into competition with the French and particularly the British for colonies and imperial power, and this drive for new markets and new resources turned an essentially economic rivalry into a military one. Of this hypothesis, nothing really remains. The German *Weltpolitik*, the new historians tell us, for the most part drew Germany away from the European heartland, into minor skirmishing on the periphery. The globalization of the world economy, in turn, which in the first decade of the last century had reached a peak to be equalled again only in our own time, depended on peace. The bankers and industrialists were the last people in Europe who wanted a war. Capital's overwhelming desire was for peace and continued globalization. It was Lord Rothschild who entreated the *Times* of London to tone down the belligerence of its articles, and right up to the end the governor of the Bank of England was begging the Liberal cabinet minister Lloyd George, "with tears in his eyes," to keep Britain out of war. What does survive of the leftist version is a smaller and more succinct point: in every European country, the center-right establishment, faced with some kind of social-democratic or socialist challenge, reasoned that a national call to arms would be the one sure antidote to internal division. In every case—even in France, where the lines of division ran deepest—this turned out to be true, and "class division melted like butter in the frying pan of nationalism," as the historian John Lukacs puts it.

The other inevitablism, made famous by Barbara Tuchman in "The Guns of August" and later given a memorable name in her book "The March of Folly," is that the war was made inescapable by a Laocoön-like entanglement of treaties and alliances and military mobilization plans. In addition, the workings of the German "Schlieffen" plan have long been thought to have swept everyone up into battle before anyone had entirely decided to go to war. The plans called for so many men to be mobilized in such specific stages that, once the trains began to roll (and the defensive troop trains began to roll in reaction), nothing could have been done to stop them. The rulers of Europe went away on absent-minded July holidays to their old familiar spas, but the troops and trains kept on rolling in the background. The serpents were around the throat of liberal civilization before anyone had clearly imagined what might happen.

This most famous inevitablism has been revised so thoroughly that it, too, is essentially defunct. In part, this is the result of a 1961 study by the great German historian Fritz Fischer, who, moved by a desire for Germans to face the hard facts of a militarism that did not begin in 1933, insisted that the directly guilty parties were the German chief of general staff, Helmuth von Moltke, and the Austro-Hungarian chief of general staff, Franz Conrad von Hötzendorff. They were determined to have the war, Fischer insisted, and deliberately manipulated the situation, including encouraging all those holidays, on the German side, to prevent anyone from acting decisively to stop them. Fromkin's book is, essentially, Fischer's view put into lively, popular English.

Strachan and Stevenson—a historian at the London School of Economics—complicate that view. The Germans may have wanted a war, but they surely didn't want *this* war. What Conrad had in mind was a much more limited war, a war with Serbia. Even if Moltke and Conrad were in favor of a war on German-Austrian terms, they did not control the crucial casus belli—the assassination of the Archduke—and they could not have forced the hands of so many players on their own. At the same time, the new scholars have exploded the idea that the Schlieffen plan was actually useful, let alone a well-oiled doomsday machine. It was an old academic, deskbound exercise, in case of a possible war with France, which specified almost nothing in practical terms, much less dressed troops and routed trains. The Germans were not blindly following a preset plan; they were making it up as they went along, sometimes in a state of panic produced by the absence of a plan.

"You may now begin your insane experiment."

So it was not a march of folly at all. It was a march of fools. That is, it was not a tragedy of errors and misunderstandings that carried the unknowing participants toward an end that they could not envision. It was the deliberate decision of individuals who thought they knew just what they were getting into. The causes of the First World War, the newer scholarship often implies, can be understood in classic game-theory terms, with all the players trying to maximize their own interests. Except that this was a game being played by terribly inept players.

Part of the problem was personal. You could not have chosen a worse bunch of guys to have the fate of Europe in their hands. There is Kaiser Wilhelm, the deformed lesser member of the dominant royal family of Europe, intensely jealous of his cousin Edward VII and his Francophile ways (although Edward had died by 1910, the icon still shone), and determined to act in a manly and warriorlike way, yet caught in a bizarre cycle of peevishness, belligerent insecurity, and a superstitious fatalism that he thought of as "religious." There is Count Conrad, who genuinely seems to have acted in part because he was in love with a married woman and imagined that success in war would help his romance. Even Herbert Asquith, the British Prime Minister, who for some reason gets off very lightly in British histories, seems hopelessly inadequate to the occasion. Although he, of all people, should have had the brains and the presence of mind to grasp what was coming—and he did; he went for a solitary drive, "filled with sadness," on the day the war began—he hewed to the customs of cabinet government, conceding the initiative to Lord Grey, his foreign secretary, and was remarkably passive throughout the crucial July days. (He paid the worst possible price for his failure, losing his eldest son in the war.)

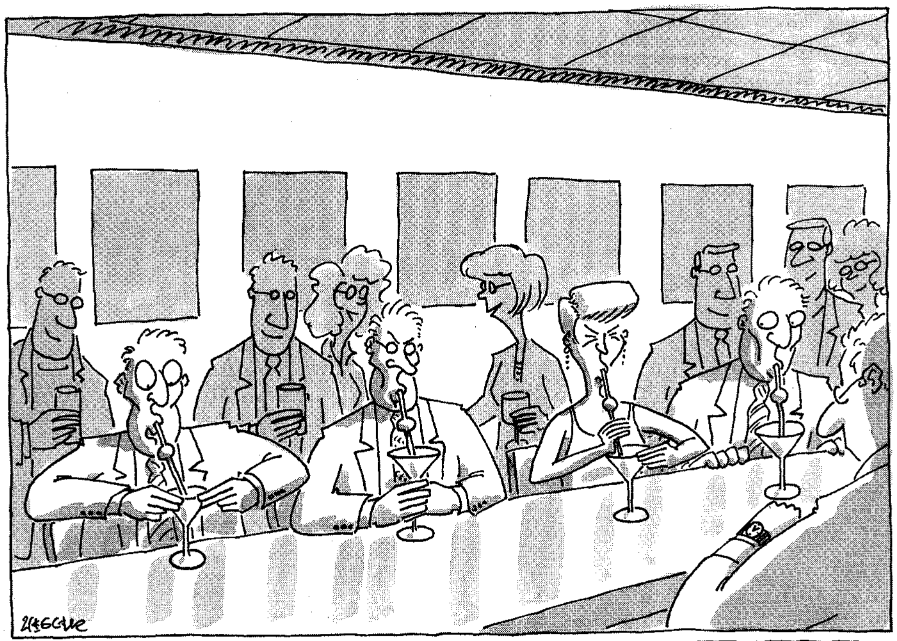
Another problem with the game was procedural. Keegan points out that there were no decisive conferences, no crucial cabinet meetings when soldiers and politicians met and brutally sorted through likely outcomes and risks. And, where the "game players" of the Cold War had the images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki directly in front of them, there was no comparable image of achieved destruction to make utterly clear what would happen if mass armies fought with machine guns in the heart of Europe. Moltke, it is true, had said in 1906 that a future war would be a "long wearisome struggle with a country that will not be overcome until its whole national force is broken." Still, a mad military optimism reigned. As Brose writes, "Many commanders in Germany and Europe harbored stubborn 'we will survive' attitudes that enabled them to scoff at mounting arguments against attacking headlong into a rain of bullets."

And in fact the previous century had been filled with wars, and none of them left behind much more than a scar and a memory of honor. The worst recent war in Europe, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, had made a deep imprint on the French psyche, but it was immediately followed by the decade that resides in our imagination—courtesy of the Impressionists, but courtesy of the facts, too—as idyllic. How bad could a war be? The Germans thought that, more or less, it would be like 1870; the French thought that, with the help of the English, it *wouldn't* be like 1870; the English thought that it would be like a modernized 1814, a continental war with decisive interference by Britain's professional military; and the Russians thought that it couldn't be worse than just sitting there.

Above all, the tragedy was that their goal was not to look weak. Even in Strachan's dry and unemotional narrative, one wet and emotive word rings out again and again, and that word is "humiliation." The game was not to prevail—for all the players, save perhaps some of the Germans, knew that none of them could—but to avoid being seen as the loser. There are, in the recorded words, 'few references to rational war aims, even of the debased, acquisitive kind; instead, you find a relentless emphasis on shame and face, position and credibility, perception of weakness and fear of ridicule. "This time I shall not give in," Kaiser Wilhelm repeated robotically (to the arms manufacturer Krupp) in July of 1914. Lloyd George, on the British side, a key actor in favor of war, called for the mobilization of a million men lest Britain not be "taken seriously" in the councils of Europe. It was not runaway trains but a fear of being humbled, "reduced to a second-rate power," that drove the war forward. The keynote is insecurity, an insecurity that arose, above all, from the German paranoia about encirclement, matched by Britain's insecurity about its naval power. How a great power at the apex of its influence, with no obvious rivals in sight—the British didn't want a rival navy, but were more or less content with a minor German empire—grew convinced that it was beset by an overwhelming existential danger is difficult for a contemporary American to understand, of course, but somehow that is what happened.

It was common in the past century to see the war as a blunder into which the masses were herded like sheep while the poets and philosophers grieved in vain. The new histories suggest that the war was welcomed in 1914, and particularly by the literate classes, as a necessary act of hygiene, a chance to restore seriousness of purpose after the two trivial decades of the Edwardian Belle Époque. The bourgeois atomization of society—with its pursuit of private pleasures at the expense of common cause, its celebration of goods at the expense of honor—would be repaired by a unifying new national purpose. Chesterton and Sherlock Holmes, in different ways, recapture the mood of dissatisfaction with the bourgeois, the decadent, the trifling, and the petty. (In "His Last Bow," Holmes's last adventure, which is set in the summer of 1914, Holmes says to Watson, "It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared.") These were not words forced on a pliant population; they were words rising from a dynamic ideology. Even Thomas Mann used the vocabulary sympathetically: war was a moral necessity, "both a purging and a liberation." In England, particularly, any vestiges of the era of Wilde would be swept away at last, and the reign of Kipling secured. The intellectuals of 1914 didn't want the moral equivalent of war; they wanted war as a way of driving out moral equivalence—ending relativism and decadence and materialism and all the other familiar evils of a shopping and pleasure-seeking society. They exulted in the moral clarity of the coming confrontation after the debasing decades of bourgeois pleasures, and welcomed the end of their long holiday from history. The poet Rupert Brooke, on his way to war, wrote:

> Now, God be thanked Who has matched
>   us with His hour,
> And caught our youth, and wakened us
>   from sleeping,
> With hand made sure, clear eye, and
>   sharpened power,
> To turn, as swimmers into cleanness
>   leaping.



THE FRIDAY-NIGHT OLIVE RACES DOWN AT THE TRIBECA MARTINI BAR

Of course, the swimmers weren't leaping into clean water but wading into blood. The scale and suddenness of the killing that began that summer still has the power to amaze us. The war began on August 4th. By August 29th, there were two hundred and sixty thousand French dead. The first battles were as bad as the last. A German lieutenant led his virgin division into battle in Lorraine that month and, coming under French fire for the first time, looked around after a minute "to see how many are still fit to fight. The bugler, who has remained by my side like a shadow, says to me sadly, 'Herr Leutnant, there is nobody there any more!' " Almost the entire unit had been annihilated at first contact.

The means of annihilation are familiar. The machine gun, in particular, created a zone of death that would simply saw a soldier in two if he entered it. At Waterloo, an infantry soldier could fire twice a minute. The machine gun fired six hundred rounds a minute. Even the infantry rifle now could fire a dozen times a minute, and at a mile's range.

Although the Battle of the Marne was a classic battle of maneuver, the Western Front that emerged in its wake in northern France was the largest and most terrible standoff in history. Both Strachan and Stevenson want to remind us that this really was a world war, not limited to the Somme and Verdun, and they make insistent tours of the war's many other fronts, from Moscow to Gallipoli. Yet, as Paul Fussell observed many years ago in "The Great War and Modern Memory," it is the Western Front that draws us back again and again: all the other fronts were, as the brutal logic of German military thinking recognized, peripheral. The Western Front was the lethal situation, the Wasteland, and something entirely new in human history: the years-long, two-sided siege of an entire civilization.

The front stretched for four hundred and seventy-five miles, with ten thousand soldiers per mile. There was no way to outflank it without encroaching on Swiss or Dutch neutrality. The front line actually consisted of three lines of trenches, and the trenches were as deep as thirty feet. The trench networks were sometimes separated by a no man's land of only five or ten yards. The defensive edge offered by the machine gun and the trench system was overwhelming, and the only way to counter it was through infantry assaults, in which soldiers got up out of the trenches and walked toward the other side. In theory, these assaults were "prepared" by artillery barrages. But, in the first two years of the war, at least, the artillery was not sufficiently developed to do much more than break up the barbed wire on the other side. On one day during the Battle of the Somme, in the summer of 1916, more than fifty thousand British troops died walking directly into German fire, without advancing the front by a single foot. In fact, the entire front, which cost the lives of more than three million human beings, moved scarcely five miles in three years. The killing was ideologically catholic. Rudyard Kipling's son John died on the Western Front in 1915; Oscar Wilde's son Cyril died there nine months later.

Given the scale and pointlessness of the slaughter, the usual thing has been to blame the incompetence and stupidity of the generals, who carried on getting their own men killed even when they knew that the tactic was hopeless. The Conservative British politician Alan Clark wrote, in the nineteen-sixties, an eyebrow-raising book called "The Donkeys," placing the blame for the slaughter squarely on the shoulders of the British commanders, and there is a generation for whom Douglas Haig's stupid, shining smiling face seems like an eternal reproach. And yet the new historians of the Great War conclude that the generals did the best they could, in the face of the defensive advantage offered by the machine gun and the rapid-firing rifle, not to mention the more tactically inconclusive but still lethal gas and flamethrower. If a steering committee of Grant, Montgomery, Napoleon, and Agamemnon had been convened to lead the allies, the result would have been about the same. (And the generals turn out to have got killed in more than honorable numbers, too. Thirty-four British generals were killed by artillery, twenty-two by small-arms fire.) The same high-command recklessness, after all, had been active in our Civil War, where massed rifle fire had some of the effect, on a smaller scale, of machine-gun fire. Yet no one calls Grant a bad general for sending his men forward at the Wilderness or Cold Harbor; in fact, Grant's greatness as a general rested on his willingness to "face the arithmetic," in Lincoln's cold but accurate phrase. (One thing that made the arithmetic worse was, with no small irony, modern medicine. Where in the past the majority of fatalities in war had been from disease and infection, in this conflict wounded men could quickly be saved and sent back into the lines. That lesser miracle of modernity canned food meanwhile assured that there was no need for winter pauses or retreats.)

The rational expectation might have been for the horror and the futility of the war, which were evident as early as the winter of 1914, to lead to a negotiated settlement. But, with the bloody human logic of wartime, the stalemate of 1914 only helped seal in place an ideological justification. At the moment for remorse and repentance, all that appeared were new and higher-minded rationalizations. The more men died, the more urgently a cause had to be found for them to die for. The obvious absurdity of the original moral calculations—that a quick result would teach the German militarists a lesson or, on the other side, put the French empire out of business—led people to make new, desperate ones. In Britain, it was only after the first battles of the trenches that this became "the war to end all wars," a war for liberal freedoms against authoritarianism and militarism. In Germany, it became a war not for French territory but for organic *Kultur* against cosmopolitan *civilisation.*

It's not surprising that intellectuals could find rationalizations for a war that their own book-bound bloodlust had helped produce. But why did the soldiers keep going back? Partly, it was selective amnesia and the adhesion of affection. Very few soldiers or officers calculated their own odds as fatal; as Siegfried Sassoon documents beautifully in his great memoir, "Memories of an Infantry Officer," the rotation between the trenches and the rear, the dugout and Paris, created a kind of dream space, a disorienting suc-

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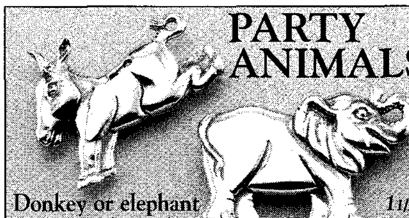
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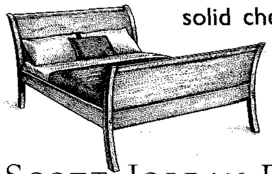
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cession of fear and reassurance. Stronger still was the primate bonding that took place among the members of a unit and passed, in defiance of all social logic, back and forth, up and down the ranks.

Another part of the explanation is that the odds of being shot by your own officers if you didn't stand there were higher than the odds of being killed if you did. From the beginning of the war, the shooting of deserters or "cowards" was severely enforced: the French condemned about eighteen hundred soldiers, and shot six hundred, and the British shot around four hundred. And, once it became plain that all hope was chimerical, the armies *did* break. In 1917, when the casualty rate became insupportable, elements of the French Army mutinied at last, the residual intelligence of the French *poilu* overcoming even his hatred of the Boche.

Popular historians, searching for a neat resolution of a messy conflict, like to give the war the usual structure of a battle narrative, complete with decisive moments and turning points. The turning points in the Great War are traditionally said to be the arrival of the American Army, in 1917, and the British invention of the tank, which was first used on a large scale in the Battle of Cambrai, later that year. But, painful as it may be, both Strachan and Stevenson are unimpressed by the American contribution, and these early tanks, it seems, were too prone to break down to be truly effective. In reality, the war did not rise to a climax in blood but, rather, wound down from exhaustion. Throughout 1917 and 1918, each front seemed on the brink of collapse, each nation seemed about to break, and each army seemed primed to break through. "The First World War was eventually resolved not by any discovery or application of new military technique by the high commands but by the relentless attrition of manpower by industrial output," Keegan writes. "The fact that it was Germany which went down to defeat in this *Materialschlacht* was almost fortuitous; it might as well have been any of her enemies." When the end came, with the Kaiser expelled from Berlin by an internal coup, and the Bolsheviks in power in Russia, it was greeted with weary gratitude. None of the big countries, as the British would say, believed that they had got a "result."

Nonetheless, both Strachan and Stevenson emphasize that the standard images of the war, and of the verdict that Keegan seconds even today—that it was an utter and futile massacre, with an additional note of industrialized absurdity that indicted the entire civilization that had allowed it—were late in coming. Memorable antiwar literature and theatre—Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front," R. C. Sherriff's "Journey's End,"and the war memoirs of Sassoon and Robert Graves, to which one could add Renoir's "Grand Illusion" and Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms"—were written only in the late nineteen-twenties. Strachan insists that this literature reflects the war seen through the prism of the twenties and not as it was understood in its time—as, in large part, a tragic necessity, the noble struggle of liberal civilization to save itself.

How impressive is this consideration? It always takes a while to look back and see on what point the significant lines of history converge—that's why they call it perspective. The Holocaust and the death camps did not come into focus as the uniquely diabolic invention of the Second World War until the nineteen-sixties. And, in any case, the sense of the First World War as meaningless horror *was* the lived experience of the participants, which became louder and clearer only after the first enforced chorus of regimented rhetoric faded. Stevenson, at least, ends with the emphatic certainty that the war was not worth the fight. Strachan is not prepared to go quite that far; he still feels that the war "was emphatically not a war without meaning or purpose." At moments, one feels that, for all Strachan's extraordinary scholarship, a certain *déformation professionnelle* has entered into his work. He has stared into the trenches so long that the trenches have begun to stare into him. He is not pro-war, exactly; rather, the Western Front has become, for him, a varied, human fabric of collisions and good and noble purposes. The trouble is not that what he reports is in any way false; the trouble is that anything can become "normalized" if given a detailed enough historical treatment. The Devil draws straight with crooked lines, too.

And so the question remains: Were they right to fight? What would have happened if the British neutrals had held fast on August 3rd and not gone in? A Europe overrun by a triumphant German militarism is only one possibility. A Communist revolution in France is a secondary possibility, with unknowable consequences. Another is that the end of 1914 would have produced the exact same situation without the British that it did with them: a quick bloody stalemate, and the possibility of an intervention and an early armistice.

Yet it is hard to see even a victorious German Reich costing liberal civilization quite as much as its defeat did. Wilhelmine Germany was, if not liberal, at least plural: the internal forces pulling at German militarism—democratic and liberal and socialist and, particularly, scientific—were extremely strong. The logic of German militarism may have meant that there would be a war sooner or later. But, just conceivably, the force of German civil society—of science and reason, in that age of Einstein and Freud and Planck and Warburg—would have tempered the force of militarism. The experiment never had a chance. What is hard to imagine is a worse consequence: Britain and France demoralized and depleted, Germany humiliated but not vanquished, Russia robbed of any chance of liberal reform and turned over to a gang of psychopathic fanatics. What exactly would have been worse than that?

And this is, of course, to speak only in the grand, indifferent language of Hegelian mega-history. It may be that no one can write military history without the language of mandarin euphemism; when Shelby Foote writes of "hard fighting" on Stonewall Jackson's flank, or Strachan of a "sanguinary engagement," it requires a determined mental act to recall that what happened was not an entry on a tally sheet but the violent death of a human being, loved and cared for by a mother and father, and full of hope and possibility, torn apart by lead balls or shreds of sharp metal, his intestines hanging open, or his mouth coughing blood, in a last paroxysm of pain and fear. And then to recall that any justification for a war has to be a justification for this reality. Any other calculation about German militarism or the possible fate of French colonies has to incorporate this image into its nucleus and accept it as justified.

History does not offer lessons; its

unique constellations of contingencies never repeat. But life does offer the same points, over and over again. A lesson is many-edged; a point has only one, but that one sharp. And the point we might still take from the First World War is the old one that wars are always, in Lincoln's perfectly chosen word, astounding. They produce results that we can hardly imagine when they start. It is not that wars are always wrong. It is that wars are always wars, good for destroying things that must be destroyed, as in 1864 or 1944, but useless for doing anything more, and no good at all for doing cultural work: saving the national honor, proving that we're not a second-rate power, avenging old humiliations, demonstrating resolve, or any of the rest of the empty vocabulary of self-improvement through mutual slaughter.

Kipling learned this, if the Kiplingites still haven't. Niall Ferguson ends his recent neo-imperialist polemic "Colossus" with a mention of Kipling on the White Man's Burden (which he rejects), and then a quote from Kipling on the fragility of empire (which he admires), but he leaves uncited the best poem Kipling ever wrote about war and its consequences, the simple couplet produced after his son was killed:

> If any question why we died
> Tell them, because our fathers lied.

No one has ever thought that the First World War didn't have meaning, in the sense of an effect on things that came after, and purpose, in the sense that it happened because people believed it to be necessary. The questions persist. Were this purpose and this meaning worth the expense of life, the deaths of all those nineteen-year-old boys? Was what had been achieved in Europe by 1919 worth knowing that your son gasped out his last breath in the mud, as Kipling and eight million other fathers did? Was the credibility of liberal civilization worth the suicide of liberal civilization? One of the things that twentieth-century philosophy learned, in the wake of the war, is that big words are empty uniforms without men to live out their meanings, and that high moral purposes have no value outside a context of consequences. As the new century begins, the First World War seems as present, and just as great a pity, as it ever did. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Cloud Atlas, *by David Mitchell (Random House; $14.95).* Mitchell's virtuosic novel presents six narratives that evoke an array of genres, from Melvillean high-seas drama to California noir and dystopian fantasy. There is a naïve clerk on a nineteenth-century Polynesian voyage; an aspiring composer who insinuates himself into the home of a syphilitic genius; a journalist investigating a nuclear plant; a publisher with a dangerous best-seller on his hands; and a cloned human being created for slave labor. These five stories are bisected and arranged around a sixth, the oral history of a post-apocalyptic island, which forms the heart of the novel. Only after this do the second halves of the stories fall into place, pulling the novel's themes into focus: the ease with which one group enslaves another, and the constant rewriting of the past by those who control the present. Against such forces, Mitchell's characters reveal a quiet tenacity. When the clerk is told that his life amounts to "no more than one drop in a limitless ocean," he asks, "Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?"

Le Colonial, *by Kien Nguyen (Little, Brown; $24.95).* Nguyen's first novel, "The Tapestries," followed the long silk thread of his Vietnamese family's history (his grandfather was a court embroiderer) against a background of strife, oppression, and social change. Here he reaches further back into Vietnam's history: it is 1773, the country is called Annam, and three French missionaries, financed by the French government, set off to convert the Annamese to Christianity. The trio are confronted by relentless horrors—executions, pillage, starvation—which challenge their religious faith. The violence of the story is sometimes at odds with the author's penchant for poetic description, which is more suited to quieter interludes, as when a character walking along the coast of the South China Sea watches as the sun "bloomed like a red dahlia, petals ablaze."

Copies in Seconds, *by David Owen (Simon & Schuster; $24).* This history of the Xerox copier starts with its inventor, a Caltech graduate named Chester Carlson, who in 1938 made the first xerographic reproduction—a piece of waxed paper that read "10-22-38 Astoria." Xerography was difficult to perfect, requiring a coördinated ballet of paper-handling and electric charge, and it was more than twenty years before the first commercial copier, Model 914, went into production. An ungainly machine, it imparted electric shocks and used rabbit fur as a key part, but it solved a centuries-old problem—making document reproduction possible without a roomful of monks or a collection of foul-smelling chemicals. One-touch copying (and its evil twin, the paper jam) was born. Owen has a knack for explaining technical innovations in layman's terms, and he vividly conveys the magnitude of Xerox's coup: in 1961, when a television ad showed a young girl making copies, a competitor demanded proof that she was not a midget.

The Untold Story, *by Iain Calder (Miramax; $24.95).* In this memoir of twenty years of editing the *National Enquirer*, Calder insists loudly on the tabloid's cultural significance, but his book is strangely parochial: a hagiography of the magazine's late owner, Generoso Pope, Jr., cut with blustery war stories about the tactics of its dirt-gathering corps—cummerbund cameras, clueless-tourist disguises. Calder makes good points about the *Enquirer's* revolutionizing effect on the news industry and the uneasy complicity it forged between celebrities and journalists. Nonetheless, his reminiscences tend to showcase his starstruck side. He devotes more pages to the time he was asked to appear in a vacuum-cleaner advertisement than to the 2001 anthrax attack on the magazine's headquarters, and he is so proud of meeting Glen Campbell at a supermarket-convention gala in Las Vegas that he named his first child Glen.

THE ART WORLD

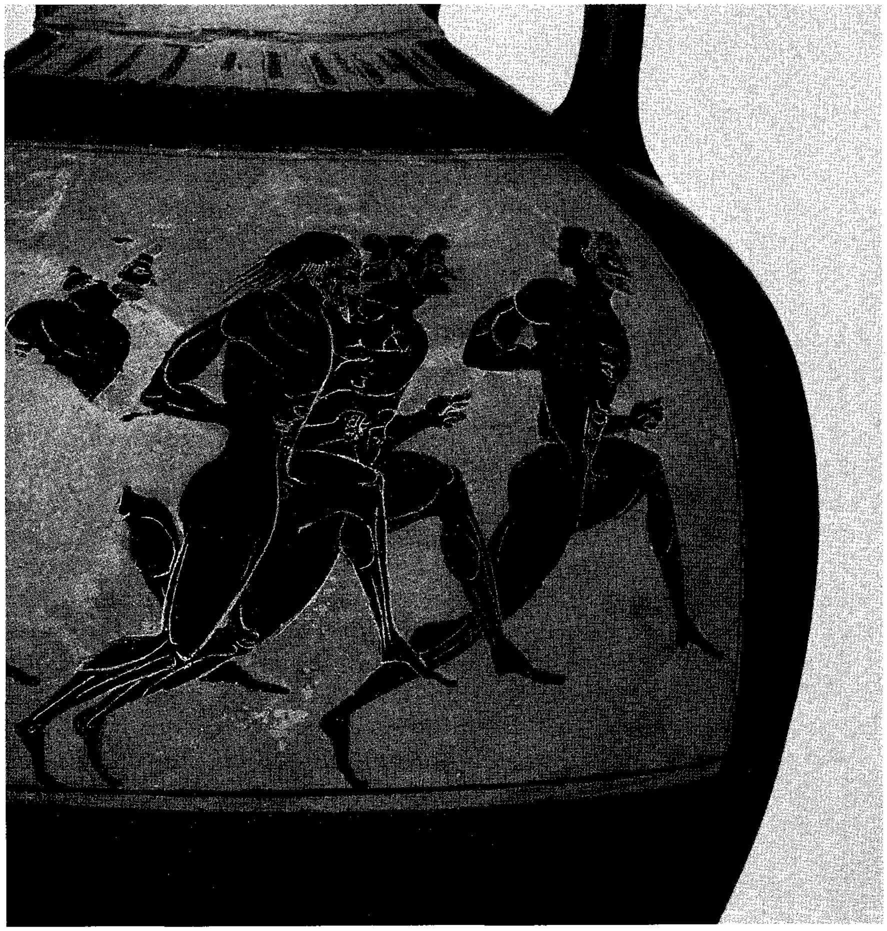
GREEK GIFTS

Two museums showcase the ancient games.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Socrates liked it better than costly perfumes: a compound smell of olive oil, earth, and sweat. He would have grown up knowing it from the playing fields and the *gymnasia* (literally, "places for training in the nude") at festivals where, for a thousand years, throughout Greece and its colonies, sport and civic and religious observance and, on the evidence of Greek art, sex meshed. ("Each age has its own beauty," Aristotle wrote. "In youth, it lies in the possession of a body capable of enduring all kinds of contests . . . while the young man is himself a pleasant delight to behold.") Athletes oiled and dusted their bodies before competing, and afterward—in an act that had a name: *apoxyosis*—scraped themselves clean with curved metal implements called strigils, which appear often in vase paintings. I found myself fixating on those tools of soapless ablution at two museum shows conceived in honor of the 2004 Olympics: the profuse "Games for the Gods: The Greek Athlete and the Olympic Spirit," at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the modest "The Games in Ancient Athens," at the Metropolitan. I thought of the dazzling bodies they once touched—perhaps female as well as male. (There were games for girls, too.) Harsh caresses of the strigil thickened the summer smell of honorable, exciting dirt, which, like the vanished colors of Greek statuary and the vertiginous intelligence of Greek religion, can only be imagined now.

Television is odorless. Not much besides a core menu of events and a certain vicarious idealism, overlaid with pompous spectacle that is more properly Roman than Greek in heritage, links the modern Olympics to the ancient. Lost is an intimate fullness of humanity—sensual, intellectual, spiritual—that may be represented by the sublime and funny notion, evoked in Plato's Symposium, of Socrates hanging around the *gymnasia* for reasons that included but were not limited to teaching philosophy. Not that I'm complaining. Our Olympics are fun, and at least their sporting element—the pitting of the best against the best, from around the world—is impeccable, though marred now by the tape measure and the clock. The Greeks were casual about measurements and kept few statistics except for who won. We know that the sixth-century-B.C. wrestler Milo, among his other feats, made four consecutive grand slams of Greece's most prestigious games, at Olympia (the Olympics), Delphi, Isthmia, and Nemea. Those "crown" games occurred every two or four years; other festivals, including the very grand Panathenaic, kept athletes busy in between. Team sports were almost unknown—except in Sparta, which also stood out for the violence of its contests and for allowing a considerable degree of female participation. With few exceptions, second place counted for nothing. In each event, the Greeks sought one hero, whom they celebrated, as they did all aspects of their sports, with consummate artistry.



A Panathenaic winner's prize. With few exceptions, second place counted for nothing.

As Keats demonstrated, one gets the most out of decorated Grecian earthenware when caught up in its story lines. This is easy at the Met, and especially so in Boston, given the thematic unity of objects that include sculptures (often Roman copies), reliefs, coins, and such items as discuses of widely different sizes, hand weights used by long jumpers, and an enchanting little ceramic ball that bears a young girl's crudely lettered praise of her favorite athlete. Repetitive images of runners, jumpers, fighters, and chariot racers in action build a visceral intuition of grace and grit *à la grecque*. The Boston show cogently tracks stylistic evolutions, from the Bronze Age to the Hellenic and beyond (there's marvellous stuff from the Etruscans). Some things are better than others. We grasp anew the supreme mastery and imagination of Greek artists of the sixth and fifth century B.C. in, for example, the goofy glee of two nude males leaping to the accompaniment of a double flute, the grave sensuality of strigil-wielding nude women gathered around a basin, and the oddly unsettling sight of an athlete feeding the accumulated residue from his strigil to a happy dog.

Vase painting is a double craft, of cartooning, which tells a story, and of ornamentation formally adapted to the mass, contours, and colors of a vessel. Classical Greek artists have never been equalled for their simultaneous command of illustration and decoration, realism and abstraction, and humor and awe. (Their nearest rivals are modern: Matisse and Picasso.) The imagery of pretty young people contending, training, cleaning up, or just horsing around is free and easy, with a feel of on-the-spot reportage. Most of the cups and bowls—kylikes, kraters—were used for wine drinking, in what must be fancied a clubhouse atmosphere. Large amphorae, which were awarded to winners of games in Athens, were less inventive. Essentially as identical as Oscars, they bear an image of the event on one side and of Pallas Athena on the other. They were most coveted for their contents: gallons of valuable olive oil. Prizes and perks varied among the games—from cash to lifelong free meals at public expense—but they were lavish enough to justify the conclusion, by John J. Herrmann, Jr., and Christine Kondoleon, in their fine, deeply informative introduction to the catalogue of the Boston show, that "Greek athletes were professionals," albeit professionals imbued with spiritual glamour.

Three figures besides the local deity (Athena in Athens, Zeus at Olympia) commonly presided over the Greek games: the demigod Herakles and the gods Hermes and Eros. Thus: strength, cunning, and, in Walt Whitman's priceless word, adhesiveness. Especially in Athens, contests might begin and end at an altar to Eros, perhaps ritualizing first the suspension and then the reinstatement of social comity. In between, the operative spirit was agon: pure struggle. The events, including running, jumping, boxing, wrestling, javelin, discus, pentathlon, and horse and chariot racing, all related to warfare, which, constant among the Greeks, was put on hold with the arrival of agents heralding the Olympics. One contest, a form of extreme fighting called the *pankration*, was war for two. "One must wipe out one's opponent by doing everything," Pindar advised in an ode. Absent a scoring system, bouts continued until one party surrendered or passed out. (The same went for boxing.) Vase paintings display kicks to the groin and a maneuver called *akrocheirismos*, which was designed to break a man's fingers. But killing an opponent got you disqualified; the deceased won.

Besides ferocity, cheating seems to have been common at the Greek games. Indeed, a founding legend of the Olympics concerns the demigod Pelops, who won his wife in a chariot race by sabotaging, to fatal effect, her jealous father's vehicle. The extravagance of efforts to enforce fairness testify to the scope of the problem. Lining the road to the stadium at Olympia were statues of Zeus, called *zanes*, built with money from fines levied on the miscreants and their home cities. (Rather than pay one such fine, Athens observed the tradition of the Olympic boycott; the oracle at Delphi settled that dispute by threatening the Athenians with a cutoff of services.) How the Greeks would have regarded modern athletes' use of performance-enhancing drugs is easily imagined. If it made humans more godlike, what could be bad? Museums would be exhibiting vases decorated with lyrical scenes of injection and pill-popping.

The Greeks aestheticized everything, and brought a nose for essences (metaphysical as well as olfactory) to bear on shared experience. Commoners and philosophers cheered as one at the games. They still do. My own life as a fan convinces me that sport, at its most refined, differs from art in only one crucial feature (which, incidentally, eliminates a need for critics): scorekeeping. Serious artists are fully as competitive as athletes. We're just never sure which of them wins, or even, in our fractured culture, at what game. The Greeks reprove us. Their simultaneous comprehension of immortal hope and carnal funk—of Zeus and strigils—persists, through their art, to remind each generation of a once and (why not?) future betterness in everything. ♦

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THE THEATRE

LIARS AND CHEATS

"The Day Emily Married" and "Fiction."

BY HILTON ALS

Had I been around at the time that J. Hartley Manners's notoriously treacly melodrama "Peg o' My Heart" began its historic run on Broadway, in the early years of the last century, I might well have been a fan. There are certain occasions in a theatregoing life—in life in general—when you want something comforting, a dip in a warm bath filled with the aromatic oil of sentiment. In theatrical terms, this means well-drawn characters living in a self-contained, dramaturgically sound world where, when conflict arises, there is a resolution—and the characters never break the fourth wall to comment on the action.

Horton Foote's "The Day Emily Married" (a Primary Stages Production, at 59E59 Theatres) is a distinctly traditional play, a narrative crowded with small-town incident and revelation which leaves you utterly satisfied. It's not a great work of art—it lacks the necessary scope—but it has great moments. These moments are the product of Foote's unimpeachable dramatic sense. Like William Inge before him, Foote is one of the nicest artists around, and you can tell that his characters trust him and give him a lot of sweet talk because he's a kind and patient listener. His respect and empathy for the emotional and practical minutiae of his characters' lives draw you into a world that, to contemporary audiences, might at first seem corny, but which during the course of the play leaves you feeling embarrassed for having dragged your cynicism into the theatre; it's like wearing hot pants to church.

The imaginary Harrison, Texas, is a flat cotton town of sharecroppers and landowners about two hours from Houston. It's not the center of the world, but you couldn't tell the inhabitants that—certainly not Lyd (Estelle Parsons) or her husband, Lee Davis (William Biff McGuire), landowners who are thinking about retiring and selling their farm. Lyd—Lee calls her Belle—is seventy-five, a former flapper who has lost none of her flap. She is charming; she's also sad, a woman with slicked-down hair parted on the side who wears caked red lipstick and resembles nothing so much as one of those fake Madame Alexandre dolls you see propped up on beds in trailer homes in places like Harrison. Like a dolly, Lyd loves pampering, and for most of her life she has demanded and received a great deal of it. She always wants more. She says to Lee, "You've been so good to me all these years. . . . I was talking to some ladies the other day, and they were bragging about their husbands, and I said, 'I have a husband who has never said a cross word to me and every morning of my life has brought me two slices of bacon and a poached egg and toast and coffee to my bed and kisses me and says, "Eat your breakfast." ' " Lyd is always cold (she may or may not be physically ill), and her neediness seems to be a bid for sympathy. This trait grows more pronounced as she prepares for the second marriage of her daughter Emily (the playwright's daughter, Hallie Foote), to Richard Murray (James Colby), a handsome bear of a man. A small-time entrepreneur, Richard has a special interest in the Davises' retirement: their land. Almost immediately, one gets the sense, watching Hallie Foote's spectacularly drab Emily (she gives a strong performance), that Emily's life is a triumph over self-pity. Emily is at the mercy of so many realities and desires—having to be a good daughter, wanting to be a wife—that if she buckled under the various pressures she would never get up. Defeated by her father's seemingly benign but ultimately controlling nature and by her mother's theatricality, Emily finds her value in being recessive and useful. A Southern lady of the old school, she was born ancient.

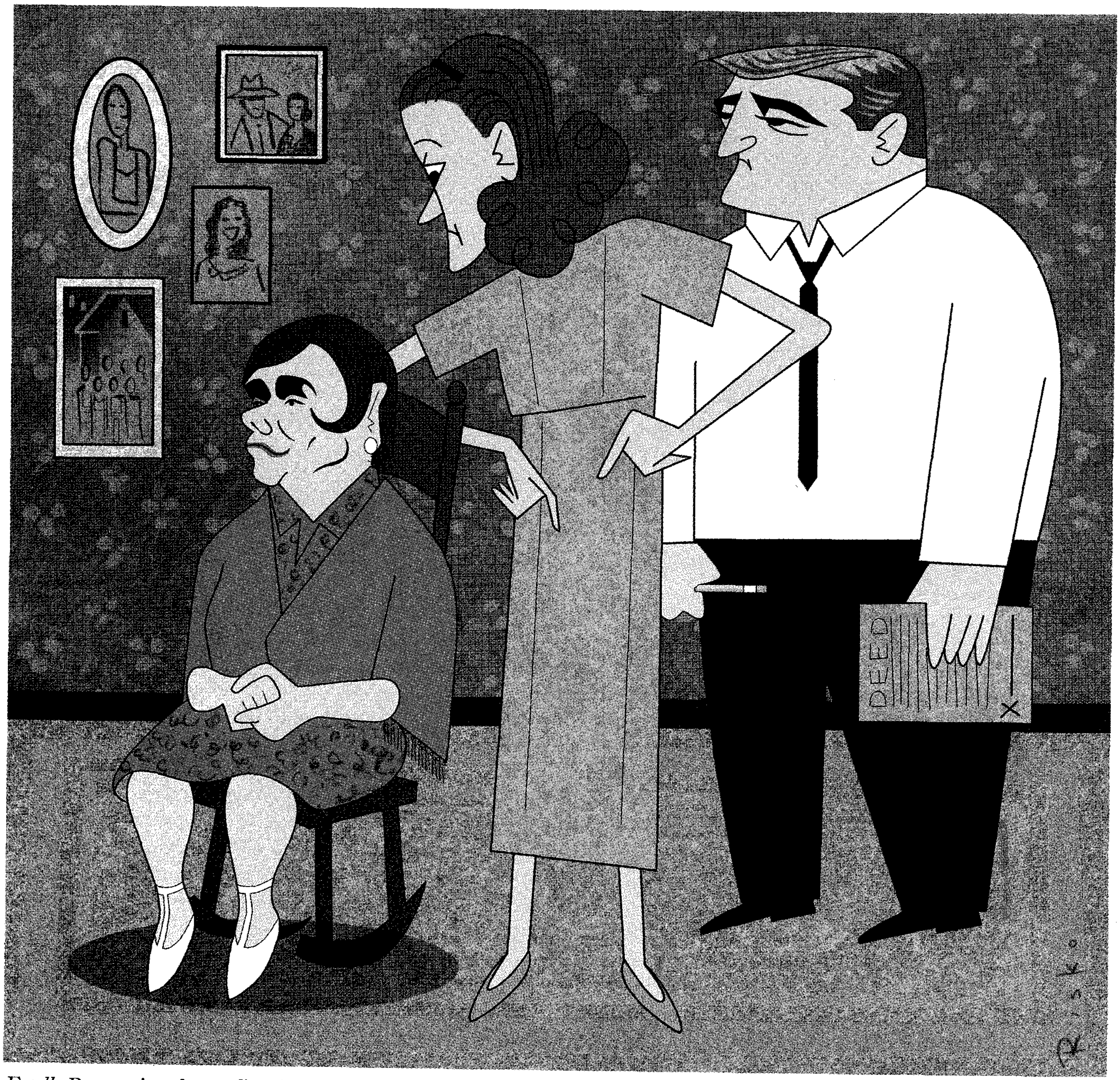
As mothers go, Lyd has always been a millstone around Emily's neck. She cannot bear to see her daughter noticed, even for a minute; it would compete with her constant demands, issued in the most singsong of Southern voices. But there's steel in that voice, too, especially when it comes to protecting herself from Richard, who blows his stack when the Davises renege on a deal that Lee, at least, has made with him. Parsons's evocation of Lyd's constant stream of memory, pain, failed dreams, and dashed hopes is astonishing. You can almost feel the chill of Lyd's flesh as what might be madness consumes her. Parsons, despite, or perhaps because of, her greatness, is generous with other actors. She lets them have their say, but she doesn't play down to them. She can't. Her character feeds on attention. And what better way to get it than by pretending, with a smile, that you're interested in what someone else has to say?

Sometime during the show, I closed my eyes so that I could concentrate on the dialogue. There's a rhythm to it: recognizably Southern but not rhetorical. The sound of it belongs to another era, the era of radio plays, when audiences relied on exposition and the externalization of a character's inner drama to keep the story moving. Obviously, Foote knows all that. As the screenwriter for "To Kill a Mockingbird" (for which he won an Oscar, in 1963), Foote has always been skilled at piecing together small moments that build toward tragedy, and he does so in "The Day Emily Married," too. Part of what makes Michael Wilson's direction as good as it is—and particularly good for Foote—is his ability to explore from the outset the characters' motivations and inner lives, laying the groundwork for their sad end. When, for example, we learn that Lee plans to betray Richard, we recall the shame that seems to have infected Lee's bonhomie all along; you can't put your finger on the reason for his sheepishness—especially when he looks at Richard—until his secret is revealed. At the close of the show, you're left replaying character and dialogue, compelled to live

ROBERT RISKO

in this complex yet parochial place long after life forces you back into the colder, darker universe outside the theatre, which some people insist upon calling the real world.

"Fiction" (a Roundabout Theatre Company production, at the Laura Pels) is, structurally at least, about as different from "The Day Emily Married" as brioche is from toast. The estimable playwright, Steven Deitz, is a postmodernist of sorts. His main characters—Linda (Julie White) and Michael (Tom Irwin)—are lovers and writers. They speak directly to the audience, which means that they talk—and talk and talk—a great deal about writing, and how writing accurately or inaccurately represents their respective inner lives. Of course, writers, per se, are not the most thrilling—or, certainly, the most forthcoming—people when it comes to discussing their "process." How do you describe navigating your way over the Khyber Pass blindfolded? Deitz, though, is too canny a playwright to leave the narrative to Linda's and Michael's words alone. To lend the play dramatic heft, he gives Linda cancer and Michael a brief dalliance with the organizer of a writers' conference. Blond and opinionated, Abby (Emily Bergl) is just the kind of girl who can drag a writer out of his head and into his body, by way of hers. And, while this was all very absorbing to consider—the truth in lies, the deceit in action—I was only half interested in the points the play tried to make, because they felt just like that: points. But the actors are to be commended, particularly White. The director, David Warren, has put together a fine cast—all of the characters look as you would imagine them—and he directs in a swift, authoritative style. In the end, though, I was only marginally engaged by "Fiction," which tries too hard to plumb some deeper truth, if only we could find it. ♦



Estelle Parsons is a demanding Southern mother who insists on being the center of attention in Horton Foote's new play.

THE CURRENT CINEMA

VILLAGE PEOPLE

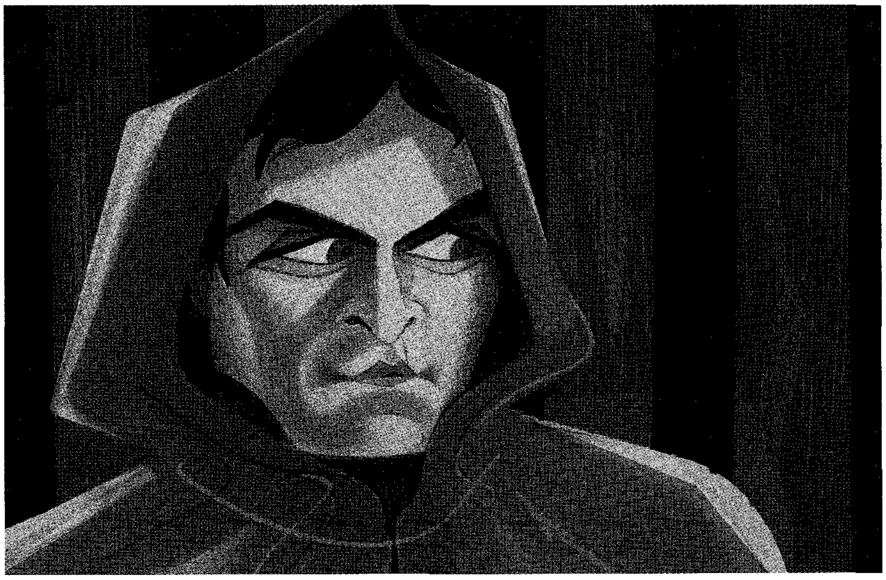
M. Night Shyamalan goes into the woods.

BY ANTHONY LANE

According to Thoreau, “Generally speaking, a howling wilderness does not howl.” One envies Thoreau many things, among them the confidence that he could stride through the woods of Maine and Massachusetts without being poked in the rear by the fender of a 4 x 4. More happily still, he never had to watch a horror film, and was thus unaware that the middle of nowhere is the worst place for a man to set up home. One cannot help wondering what he would have made of “The Village,” a movie that is dedicated both to the virtues of a stripped-down society, lit by sun and candlepower, and to the fact that an American wilderness, if you listen carefully, is indeed a howler, and more. It creaks and drones, especially at night; it scratches and clicks, as if a thousand keys were being turned in a thousand rusty locks.

The picture was written, directed, and produced by M. Night Shyamalan, who presumably, had he found the time, would have assumed every dramatic role as well. In the event, he has been forced to make do with actors, and it’s a pretty strong team. William Hurt plays Edward Walker, the Biblically bearded leader of a group of elders; his fellow-sages include Alice Hunt (Sigourney Weaver) and August Nicholson (Brendan Gleeson), and between them they have established a remote, self-sustaining commune. The era is not mentioned, but from the women’s long skirts and the men’s heavy tweeds, which appear to have been woven from odd bits of hedgerow and marmalade, you would guess the dusk of the nineteenth century. The younger generation has little to do but toil in the fields and tumble into love, and so it is with Lucius Hunt (Joaquin Phoenix), Alice’s taciturn son, and Edward’s daughter, the spirited—not to say loquacious—Ivy Walker (Bryce Dallas Howard). Ivy is blind, but it’s no big deal. If anything, it helps, because she is unable to see the HUGE SCARY MONSTERS HIDING IN THE WOODS.

Socially, we are never properly introduced to these fellows, but, from such rare glimpses as we get, I would put them down as party animals in the extreme. Again, one thinks of Thoreau and of the creatures who surrounded his homestead: “They seemed to me to be rudimental, burrowing men, still standing on their defence, awaiting their transformation. Sometimes one came near to my window, attracted by my light, barked a vulpine curse at me, and then retreated.” The brutes in “The Village” are a good eight feet tall, robed in red, with dagger-length talons in front and a bushel of don’t-mess-with-me spines sprouting out at the back. If a porcupine got a little too friendly with a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church, this is what you’d end up with. Among the sober folk of the village, the creatures are referred to as “those we do not speak of”—a clever locution on Shyamalan’s part, because although its archaic courtesy is designed to fend off the very thought of aggressors (here, in this peaceful place?), you can also imagine it on the lips of a ruling class politely disdaining lesser souls. In other words, this film is never quite the unadorned parable of the civilized versus the savage that you expect. From the start, the civilization that it depicts is seldom less than creepy; you find yourself asking what savagery has been left behind in order to arrive at such an idyll, and even whether it could—just could—be in the interests of the idyllic that the claws of intimidation be kept sharp. You may scoff at the idea that a community would not just prep itself but define itself by declaring an ever higher level of threat, in which case I would draw your attention to any newspaper of the past month.



Joaquin Phoenix plays Lucius, a villager haunted by the local beasts.

ERIC PALMA

Normally, the beasts stay beyond the boundaries of the settlement. As the film proceeds, they launch incursions, leaving skinned animals in the grass and daubing the doors with streaks of red. What led to this switch of tactics is endlessly hinted at but never made plain; one factor may be the inquisitive Lucius, who shares none of his neighbors’ reluctance to step into the forest. There is also the fact that, day by day, Ivy is growing on him; as with Rod Taylor and Tippi Hedren in “The Birds,” we sense that nature itself is vengefully displeased by the unnaturally strong passion that is rustling between a pair of humans. The difference is that Hitchcock was aroused by the spectacle of arousal, whereas Shyamalan remains as coolly unstirred by sex as he was in his previous movies—an astounding indifference, given the historical entwining of eros and fright. Even more bizarre is the gradual draining of humor from his work; the anatomy of horror demands a tongue in the cheek to go with the baring of teeth, but much of "The Village" is a proud and sullen affair.

All of which has led many audiences, including fans of Shyamalan, to gnash with disappointment. Badly wanting him to be a merchant of the horrific, they damn him for falling short, but is that really the profession that is inked on his passport? To my eyes, the man is a doomster. He has a smooth and wristy knack for a twist, but if you subtracted the majestic turnaround from the end of "The Sixth Sense" you would still have a memorable study of the morbid. Although Shyamalan is not a religious artist, and although his nudges in that direction (see Mel Gibson's donning a dog collar at the close of "Signs") make you laugh, he is honestly bugged by the afterlife—not just by the dead themselves but by the ways in which our lives tend to tighten and warp after they die. I always feel spooked at the end of a Shyamalan picture, but I mainly feel low. "The Village" is his heaviest dose of anti-Prozac to date, yet still it has risen, however briefly, to become the most successful film in the country. I guess anxiety sells.

The twists in the new film are hardly twists at all—more like sharp, satisfying curves that you can see from a long way off. Even the predictable, however, can give you the heebies, if not the full jeebies, and when Ivy sets off through the woods in a mustard-colored cape, stick in hand, you get the unmistakable, almost comforting breath of peril that we recall from fairy tales; she is Little Yellow Riding Hood, on an errand of mercy (to fetch medicine from the outside world), and there are literal pitfalls in her path. After the knowing snickers of the "Scream" and "Scary Movie" franchises, it's a relief to find a director who continues to believe that, when he lowers his camera into a muddy hole and swivels it upward to focus on the rim, we will prickle helplessly at the prospect of what may, or may not, arrive at that crumbling verge. One reason that the framing is so beautiful in "The Village" is Shyamalan's fixation on what hovers outside the fringes of the frame. Hence the sublime moment at which all the inhabitants except Ivy and Lucius have battened themselves into their houses and slunk beneath trapdoors in the floor, because those we do not speak of are on the prowl and about to commit that which we would rather not think about.

Ivy, calm as dammit, keeps the front door open and reaches into the night. She is waiting for Lucius, who is out there somewhere. We see her hand stretching into thin, dark air, and then, suddenly, as gentle as smoke, Lucius's hand comes to meet hers and hold it fast. As their fingers clutch, a red figure looms in the background. Eek. Cut to a head-on shot of the couple turning to run inside; they are in slow motion, but it is the motion less of romantic abandon than of absolute safety—they are together, they have outdistanced the monster with seconds to spare, and that is that. One of the advantages of the no-frills life to which the villagers submit is that, by necessity, it comes scraped free of mush; when Joaquin Phoenix—all tensed, inward belligerence, as usual—sits on the porch one evening with Bryce Dallas Howard (by far the most modern and illuminating presence in the movie's gloom), their mutual declaration is not sweet at all but fired with certainty, and you can't take your eyes off the glowing bank of mist that snakes along in the background, as if it were telling them to hurry up and love before the red menace returns.

I will not, of course, give away what the redness intends, or where it hails from. The word "red" itself is not used in the film, the locals speaking instead of "the bad color," but we catch it everywhere: in berries and flowers, and, early on, in a reflective puddle—a nod from Shyamalan to the equally scarlet, equally mournful terrors of Nicholas Roeg's "Don't Look Now." In short, the creatures' capes, in "The Village," take their place in the cluster of livid and accusing reds that have heated the history of cinema, from Dorothy's ruby slippers to "The Red Shoes," "Marnie," Roger Corman's "The Masque of the Red Death," "Cries and Whispers," and the little girl's coat in "Schindler's List." That is an honorable bloodline, and it schools us to accept "The Village" as both excessive and grave, needling our nerves even as it ventures into solemnity. In the words of William Hurt, "Do your very best not to scream." Thanks for the tip. ♦

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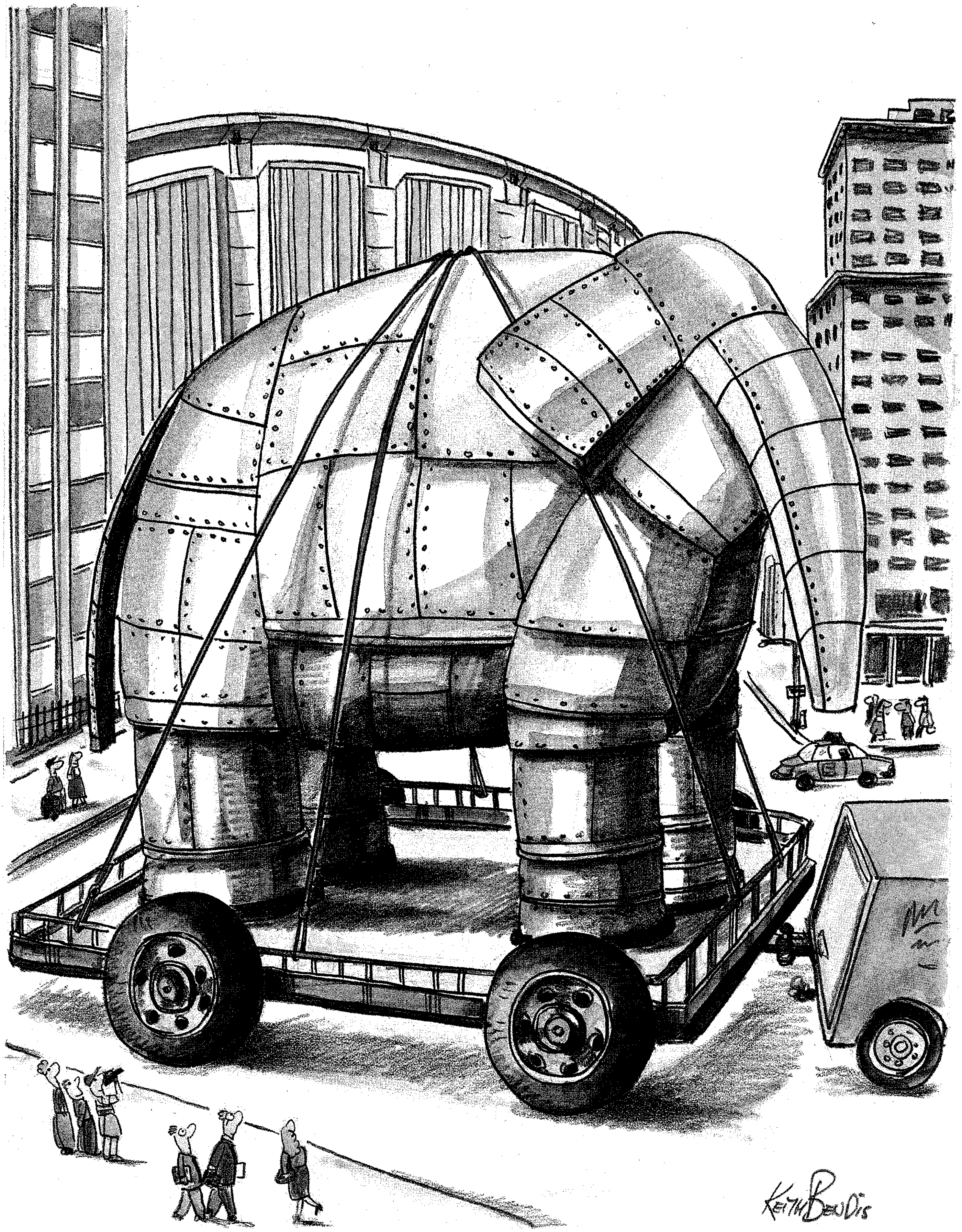

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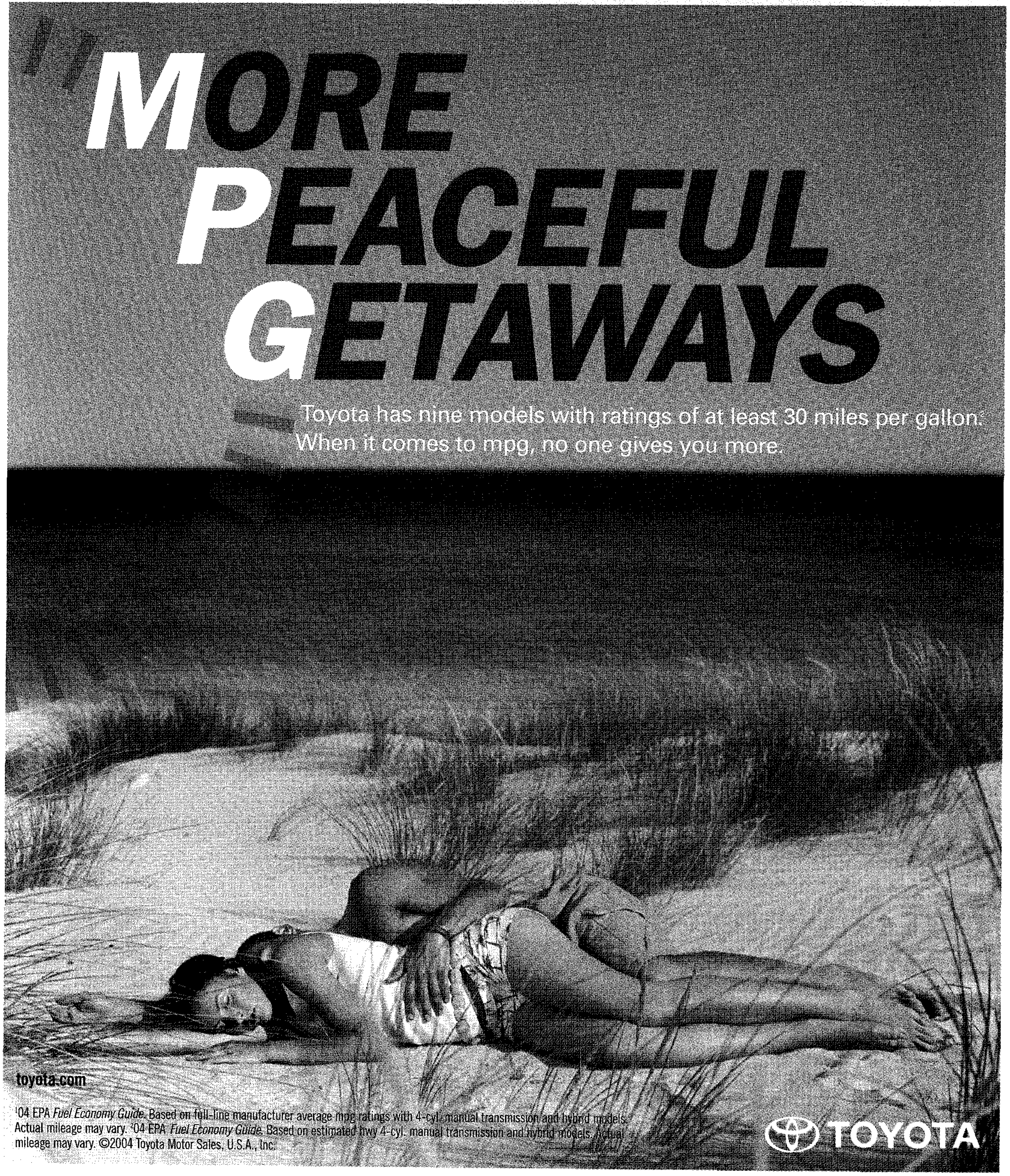

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